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EZRA POUND

A FIELD SYMPOSIUM

EZRA POUND: A SYMPOSIUM

Even if this were not Ezra Pound's hundredth year, we would probably have succumbed to the urge to organize this symposium in his honor. The emphasis of these occasions, after all, is the meaning and value that certain poets have for their fellow practitioners and thus, by implication, for all readers. And no poet or reader of poetry in this century can walk five steps in any direction, so to speak, without bumping into Ezra Pound. One is not always conscious of these encounters as Pound-related episodes. They may be with poets whose practice was deeply influenced by Pound, so that readers of Yeats's *Responsibilities* or of Williams's *Paterson* may not fully understand the role that Pound played in the theory and practice of the poetry they are reading. Similarly, all of us live with the consequences and continuing influence of Imagism; not all of us remember the extent to which the values of that particular *ism* have their origin in Pound's enthusiasms and dislikes.

Direct encounters with Pound can, of course, be a mixed blessing. He is surely the most problematic of the great modern poets, inspiring adoration and detestation with equal ease. The man can be exasperating; the poetry can be tedious and irritating. But sooner or later all good readers come to terms with these problems and, as Pound did with Whitman, they make a pact, taking what they like from the master and pardoning what they must ultimately dislike. The group of poets who have commented on Pound here represents, we think, an illuminating spectrum of reactions, typical in their variety and unique in their individual outlooks. After seven essays, we ran out of room, but we clearly could have gone on and on. The territory of Pound's achievement is very large, and the rewards that readers and writers bring back from it continue to help us define and understand his distinctive greatness.

Note: Special thanks to New Directions and James Laughlin to print Pound's work throughout this symposium.

POUND'S SOUNDS

In his life as a poet, which *The Cantos* extends and replicates, Ezra Pound discovered a thousand ways to make a noise. Although he was not innovative as an iambic poet, on the whole Pound's ear is the most inventive in modern literature. With "Cathay" he invented the lyrical flatness developed by Rexroth, Snyder, Bly and Wright; powered by an illusion of simplicity, this sound (which is also a diction) erects itself as plain, clear, lucid; and stylelessness is always a style. Along with "Cathay" Pound developed the related note of imagism, and the free-verse epigram-noise of the *Blast* poems; his flat sarcasm can contain or transmit social notes, literary judgments, cultural observations, moral outrage, and erotic feelings . . . In his "Propertius" Pound invented a discursive narrative noise which can fly to lyric touchstone-lines and accommodate narrative or reflective passages together. Useful to *The Cantos,* this sound accommodates and includes, can turn ironic *or* ecstatic, lyric *or* narrative without altering itself to the point of indecorum. By the time of "Propertius" and "Mauberley," Pound's sounds can move with swift sureness from tones at one end of the scale to the other.

But there is one special Poundian sound-figure, starting in *Personae* earlier than "Cathay" and running through *The Cantos,* which I find most breath-taking. It bunches adjacent loud syllables, as in Canto VII:

> Ear, ear, for the sea-surge; murmur of old men's voices.

(In Canto VII, "rattle" is substituted for "murmur," and the line broken after the semi-colon.) The beat is slow: percussive monosyllables, often hyphenated compounds, caesuras pronounced, loud syllables usually long as well as loud. This frequently-percussive figure softens to a falling rhythm, often for its coda, and it runs all through the Cantos. Here it is again in Canto II:

> Seal sports in the spray-whited circles of cliff-wash,
> Sleek head, daughter of Lir,
> eyes of Picasso

Under black fur-hood, lithe daughter of Ocean; . . .

From LXXIV (Pisa):

and olive tree blown white in the wind
washed in the Kiang and Han
what whiteness will you add to this whiteness,
what candor?

Here it is in a line from LXII, a patch where such examples are fewer:

Ice, broken ice, icy water

The middle Cantos for long stretches use a documentary flatness, rarely attempting this sound-figure, but it returns in the Pisan Cantos accompanied by the most Shakespearean blank verse since John Keats's. This sound-figure shows again in the wonderful bits and pieces Pound assembled towards his unreachable Paradiso in *Drafts and Fragments*:

A blown husk that is finished
but the light sings eternal
a pale flare over marshes
where the salt hay whispers to tide's change.

My examples assemble a small variation of tunes, Pound's sounds at their most erotic. These quotations refer to nothing in common; they exist in the mouth, then outward to muscle and skin in bodily sensuousness.

The sensuousness belongs to the real sound, not to idea or to the visual image or (sometimes) sound referred to. Anybody knows that the word "food" fills no bellies, but the word "food" is for chewing on all the same: *ef* that sets lip to tooth, *ou* that rounds the lips as if for kissing, *deh* that smacks tongue onto mouth-top. The word carries no calories but in a receptive mouth the juices flow . . . In this sound-figure the syllables are often long in the saying and delicious in the chewing, either through length of vowel or of vowel in combination with extended consonants, long sounds adjacent and percussive: *ear, ear; sea-surge; old men's*

voice-; Seal sports; spray-white-; cliff-wash; Sleek head daught-; Lir,/ eyes; black fur-hood; lithe daught-; tree blown white; wind/ washed; ice, broke-; ice, ic- . . . Green time; blown husk; light sings; pale flare; salt hay whisp-; tide's change . . . The mouth holds (chews, sucks on) those long syllables, and the adjacent bang-bang-bang slows rhythm down and concentrates mouth-sensations.

Other devices enforce more connections. Alliteration links these clusters: see the first, second, and fourth examples above. Assonance or near-assonance makes further linkage: in "green time" the consonants resemble each other but also the dipthong in "time," held onto, becomes the vowel of "green." Caesura's slowness enforces the thud of adjacent monosyllables. Like Ben Jonson, Pound experiments with the multiple caesura. If we re-set these lines by dropping the line down the page at the caesura (as Pound sometimes does) we have:

sleek head,
daughter of Lir,
eyes of Picasso

or:

where the salt hay
whispers
to tide's change

or:

icy,
broken ice,
icy water

Surely this rhythm resembles the triadic foot of late William Carlos Williams.

When Pound in this figure moves away from adjacent stress, he tends (daughter of Lir, eyes of Picasso) toward something like the trisyllabic foot of English meter. I avoid reference to the dactyl, as I avoid saying spondee for adjacent stress, for Pound is not making classical meter — or meter at all. Meter is measure; meter is what we count. Prosody is the larger subject or study: rhythm,

euphony, pitch — what we count as well as what exists uncounted. In Greek meter, we count the length of time syllables take to pronounce, and by convention syllables are either short or long, a short syllable just half the duration of a long one. Variations in pitch and volume of course occur, and they may be controlled and beautiful — but the poet does not *count* them.

This sound-figure of Ezra Pound's makes the happiest mouth-occasion since "Ode to Autumn" but it does not derive from anything in the iambic tradition. The few words above try to describe some of its characteristics. Another way to talk about this figure is to speculate on its sources. What in Pound's eclectic reading allowed him to invent this tune? Breaking the pentameter, we were told, was the first thing. If Pound's sounds broke the pentameter by a dozen innovations, most of them derive from his study of the alien — from reading Anglo-Saxon, Greek, Chinese, Provençal. I suggest that this sound-figure is Pound's fortuitous combination of two different, one might think unassimilable, sources.

Let me quote some pre-Canto Poundian chestnuts from *Ripostes* (1912). For one thing, there is the alliterative, percussive, falling-rhythm'd, be-caesura'd "Seafarer," translated from the Anglo-Saxon and mimicking its rhythm:

> May I for my own self song's truth reckon,
> Journey's jargon, how I in harsh days
> Hardship endured oft.
> Bitter breast-cares have I abided, . . .

Repetition of sound is rhythmic and consonantal, drumbeats of loudness separated by pronounced caesura, muscle or dance-rhythms. And on the other hand there is "Apparuit," in which Pound tried writing Sapphics in English, imitating Greek prosody with its longs and shorts, with its emphasis on the connections of repeated vowels and consonants — mouth-sound rather than leg's pounding beat. Surely "Apparuit" fails as quantitative meter: in the English tradition loud is more noticeable than long because by tradition it is what we count, and Pound makes long

and loud coincide. But in its concentration on long vowels and mouth-connections, "Apparuit" moves toward the later sound-figure: "Golden rose the house," it begins, and goes on to speak of "a marvel, carven. . . ."

Later, Pound wrote that "progress lies rather in an attempt to approximate classical quantitative meter (NOT to copy them). . . ." I think the approximation was not to classical meter but to a Greek or classical notion of euphony. This approximation shows itself in "The Return," also from *Ripostes*:

> Haie! Haie!
> These were the swift to harry;
> These the keen-scented;
> These were the souls of blood.
>
> Slow on the leash,
> pallid the leash-men!

There are eight long e's here, and the last broken line is characteristic of the cadence of the later sound-figure.

Now Anglo-Saxon metric and Greek metric do not resemble each other, and neither of them resembles traditional English meter. Anglo-Saxon verse counts the presence of caesura and the number and placement of loud sounds. It does not count relatively-louder sounds, as in the relative-stress-verse which is traditional from Chaucer's pentameter to Stevens's, nor does it count quantity like the Greeks nor court Greek euphony.

The most mouth-luscious, limb-erotic of Pound's sounds derive from the weird combination of Sappho's euphony and a Viking drumbeat. To the Greek sweetness of assonance (the first line of the Iliad includes six variations of the *ay* dipthong) Pound adds the bang-bang of north-sea alliteration and warrior drum-pounding. From the quantitative dactyl (in our misreading of long for loud) he takes his falling-rhythm. In his percussive repetition of long vowels he brings the northern drum-beat of alliterative accents together with the southern mouth-hold of two, three, four, and even five *long* syllables together — the true quantitative

spondee, sometimes two spondees in a row followed by the initial long-syllable of the quantitative dactyl. North is muscle, south is mouth, and the combination is "Ear, ear, for the sea-surge; murmur of old men's voices."

THE GARDEN

En robe de parade.
Samain

Like a skein of loose silk blown against a wall
She walks by the railing of a path in Kensington Gardens,
And she is dying piece-meal
of a sort of emotional anaemia.

And round about there is a rabble
Of the filthy, sturdy, unkillable infants of the very poor.
They shall inherit the earth.

In her is the end of breeding.
Her boredom is exquisite and excessive.
She would like some one to speak to her,
And is almost afraid that I
will commit that indiscretion.

YOUNG EZRA

Pound's earliest poems — those published, let's say, before *Cathay* — compelled and puzzled me when I first read them. I couldn't then say why. It was in 1959 and I was in high school, ferally ignorant of almost everything.

But I could hear something remarkable in the poems: they sounded like poetry as it was taught in school, and yet they sounded like someone talking — it was a heightened, shapely and passionate sort of talk such as I had scarcely heard or could only dimly imagine, but it was indisputably like talk. Sometimes the two verisimilitudes alternated and sometimes they were concurrent. The effect was magnetizing.

Jostling each other without apology in the first pages of the recently released *Selected Poems of Ezra Pound* (1957) were first lines like

> What hast thou, O my soul, with Paradise?

or

> Towards the Noel that morte saison

or

> Cydonian Spring with her attendant train,

and first lines like

> Come let us pity those who are better off than we are

or

> "Thank you, whatever comes." And then she turned

or

> Your mind and you are our Sargasso Sea.

And both tones cohabit peacefully in a first line like

> Damn it all! all this our South stinks peace.

Of course the combination of what sounds complex, acculturated, learned and exotic with what sounds direct, colloquial and dramatic is like catnip to a young reader. For it embodies the yearned-for and distrusted complexities of adult and communal life, and it embodies equally the brash, self-dramatizing resistence youth needs to stave off inundation by adult and communal life.

* * *

The young Pound was up to a similar struggle, albeit on a far more complex and fully furnished stage. Literary apprenticeship shares certain things with adolescence, after all, even if the literary apprenticeship is painstaking, learned, largely self-administered and in Pound's case will lead to the brave making of a great poet. But there is an important difference between the two, for all the obvious similarities. We all have to age and die, even if we should resist that inevitability horse, foot, and artillery. But Pound *chose* quite deliberately the apprenticeship that might make him a great poet.

It was great literature the young Pound hoped to join and from which he had sense enough to know he had much to learn. In his role as frenetic and prescient apostle of the new, Pound opposed the *worship* of great literature, which led to passive imitation, but never the *use* of great literature. Or I should say *uses*, for they include active imitation, pillaging, parody, quotations and misquotation, ventriloquism and any other means that Pound (and, most prominently among his literary cronies, Eliot) could find to put tradition to use.

That the tradition came to be more and more idiosyncratically defined only served to raise the ante for Pound's powers of discrimination. For the more he could recast the tradition in the image of his needs, the more likely that he would someday speak to Poetry or Literature the way he speaks in "A Pact" (the poem, written when Pound was quite young, serving him as a kind of promissory note to himself) to Walt Whitman:

I have detested you long enough.
I come to you as a grown child
Who has had a pig-headed father;
I am old enough now to make friends.

* * *

For all his chip-off-the-old-block pigheadedness (some pig! some head!) Pound began humbly enough, with finger exercises. *Understand the form* and *get the tone right* seem to have been the two rules. And like the pedagogical pieces of Bach (though Bach wrote them primarily to enlighten others), they bear among them wonderful melodies and flashes prefiguring mature brilliance.

Like many of Pound's best lines from this period, the first line of "The Garden" is, except for "against," all monosyllables:

Like a skein of loose silk blown against a wall

At first glance the image seems related to the famous "petals on a wet, black bough"; a beautiful and evanescent object brought forward from the blurry urban ground to be made figure. But there's also an argument in the line. The woman is ravelled and blown loose; what was coiled or wound, as a skein is, is now without form or tension. And as the first stanza goes on we see that the woman is ill, growing weightless and blowable.

Not sticking to the rail, like the woman, but "round about" are the children of the very poor. There may be a lapse of tact in this second stanza, but then maybe not; it's easier to see from 85 years into Pound's century than it was when he wrote this poem how killable the infants of the very poor can be. In any case, they are in the poem unkillable in contrast to her. There is a bumpy, durable, discursive rhythm to "filthy, sturdy, unkillable infants," by contrast to the more languid and liquid measures describing the woman, that gives the infants a future, however drab. As to the woman, her reappearance in the final stanza may well be a last sighting.

The poem seems to have travelled a long way from its first lyrical line to the abrupt and summary rhetoric of "They shall inherit the earth" and "In her is the end of breeding." But it is headed toward two final lines that recapitulate the tone and rhythms that end the first stanza. Just before those final lines will come a line, flatly declarative this time, composed wholly of monosyllables:

She would like some one to speak to her.

What's "in her," what she's "dying piece-meal/ of," *is* the end of breeding, now understood to be the full name of her disease. Her boredom is not only a poor response to the world, but also a defense, insufficient though it may prove, against the etiolation of illness. She *would* like someone to speak to her, we realize. That line is spoken by the-poet-in-sympathy-to-the-character. It is only in the last two lines that Pound shifts his tone to the poet-who-knows-who-shall-inherit-the-earth.

For all its American bluster at mannerly Britain and for all its alert interest in class and social life, the poem is swift, delicate, precisely modulated, and demonstrates both Pound's love of the large view and of shimmering detail.

* * *

Pound was to go on to bigger, more important and certainly gnarlier poems. But I continue to find these earliest poems moving and enduring, and not only — though of course that would be enough — for themselves. In them we see the invention of a style, and so by extension the invention of an artist. To think that the young man sat down to teach himself how to write verse, and to work out at the same time his ambivalent attitudes toward tradition and the new, toward American and Europe, toward colloquial and oratorical uses of English, and wrought for himself in the process a style so muscular and so lucid!

Stanley Plumly

POUND'S GARDEN

I like to think there is a pure phase in Pound's career, a phase parallel to, if entirely different from, another kind of beauty in his exilic, resolute, rich life, a phase, like that of *The Pisan Cantos*, when the technique truly was the test of the man's sincerity. It is a time between his discovery, in 1912, of the image and the hard "constatation of fact" and the discovery, two years later, of the vortex; a time between — perhaps no more than a moment — his association with H. D. and Aldington and Hulme and Flint and Ford and Yeats and the long list of poets he helped or would help and his association with artists Wyndham Lewis and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and other contributors to *Blast*; a time between Harriet Monroe and Mrs. Mary Fenollosa; between the troubadours and the *Canzoni* and the Chinese written character; between the station of the Metro and *Cathay*; between the low and the "high Modernist mode"; between economic innocence and the coming of the Great War.

I guess I'm using *pure* because in so many ways the relatively small poems that come out of this brief period — among those written in 1912 and published in *Poetry* in April, 1913, under the title "Contemporania" — rejoice in the transition between Pound's brilliant translations of the Provençal and his imitations-into-English of the Chinese and Japanese; poems that anticipate the cool, "Latin tone" of *Sextus Propertius*. These poems, these "Contemporania," though, are not conversions, whatever Latinate or Imagistic influences they may show, and they are certainly not of the epical, multiple, historical, magical voice attempted in the *Cantos*. They are the least personal of his poetry — they are really his first Pound rather than Poundian poems — and bear about the same relationship to the poet's major work as do the stories in *Dubliners* to *Ulysses*. They are strict and clean, personal and direct, "free of emotional slither," yet passionate; their intensity comes from concentration and juxtaposition; their power, I think, from the autobiography of the moment, not unlike those moments of memory and humanity in the cantos written from the cage.

"In a Station of the Metro" and "A Pact" are probably the best known of the "Contemporania" poems, but the best, in my view, is "The Garden," coming as it does, in this early portion of Pound's career, between "Portrait d'Une Femme" and the incomparable "The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter," both of which begin in aesthetic rather than actual sources. "The Garden" is no imaginary garden, and the fact that Pound makes obvious the variance between the blatant symbol of his title and the reality of the place — Garden versus Gardens — suggests how uninterested he is in the issue. And he is just as uninterested in the New as he is in the Old Testament — hence the parody, again obvious, of who shall inherit. The question is what shall they inherit. By raising these blunt issues so plainly he dismisses them. As the garden is real, the central figure, the woman, is real. Her "portrait" is like a photographic blur against a background of neutrality, "a skein of loose silk blown against a wall." This opening, resonant, remarkable simile — the warmest image in the poem — will be immediately adjusted by the literalness of the second line, and from then on the poem becomes completely an act of transformation, comprehension, and empathy — even, in hindsight, didactic. Pound, however, brings it off because like the good naturalist (i.e. Zola) he is he is making an analysis, out of care for the particular and out of passion for the type.

The tension here between the specific case and the anonymity of the general helps rescue the encounter from both sentimentality and condescension (attitudes of high purchase among Georgians). In those days Pound lived a short distance from Kensington Gardens, at 10 Church Walk, so he must have run into his subject, or others like her, more than once. "The Garden" has the feel of felt experience backed up behind it, the feel of Pound inside the poem, as an actor as well as speaker. Its language is ironic, of course; more importantly its language is beautifully precise, beautifully realized in the terms of what we would later call the correlative. Rather than Imagist, it seems to me a poem of pointed rhetoric; its impulse is to interpret, its tone to under-

state. We witness the woman, essentially, in stages, or frames, through a process of growing substantiation. The more we see the more, says the speaker, we know. The romantic yet poignant skein image of the first line will become, by the end, an image of boredom, both exquisite and excessive. As the poem develops it qualifies: she is dying *piecemeal*, and she is dying *of a sort of* emotional anemia; around her there is a *rabble*, wonderfully extended, as vers libre, as *the filthy, sturdy, unkillable infants of the very poor*, who shall inherit, like beggar Christians, the earth, this garden; her boredom is as much her problem as it is her signature; she would like to talk and is *almost* afraid the speaker will, which, given the circumstances, would be an indiscretion.

En robe de parade, the epigraph for the poem, is taken from the French of Albert Samain ("The Infanta"), and is part of the poem's incisive vocabulary. "Dressed as for a state occasion" is on line with the sublimity of the sequence of the other "exquisite" understatements, which Pound needs to achieve the distance that will allow him insight. The distance is finally the poem's vision. Some readers have found that distance to be "excessive," and they quote Pound's reference that "in her is the end of breeding," as his judgment. I can agree that the lady does seem to act, according to report, superior to the situation. But that same report surrenders to considerable compassion — the speaker would like to speak to, not simply for, the woman — and renders serious anger — the speaker understands, with some bitterness, that all of them, man, woman, unkillable child, live in a world of determinism. . . . They are in this garden together, if at arm's length. I find this poem, therefore, to be less a portrait of Pre-Raphaelite pallor or a "study in aesthetics" than a severe and responsive reading of the "luminous detail" — Pound's phrase — inherent in a moment, in the autumn of 1912. Pound's sympathy is saved by his disgust, his disgust redeemed by the absolute clarity of his perception. The woman is exactly killable, and she is as caught up in the encounter in the garden as is the rabble who will inherit it, as caught up as the poet himself. Pound has more than

identified and identified with his subject — he has imagined it, knowing full well that the filthy, sturdy infants are the future, while he and the woman are part of the twilight, before the interregnum.

from HOMAGE TO SEXTUS PROPERTIUS

I

Shades of Callimachus, Coan ghosts of Philetas
It is in your grove I would walk,
I who come first from the clear font
Bringing the Grecian orgies into Italy,
and the dance into Italy.
Who hath taught you so subtle a measure,
in what hall have you heard it;
What foot beat out your time-bar,
what water has mellowed your whistles?

Out-weariers of Apollo will, as we know, continue their Martian generalities,
We have kept our erasers in order.
A new-fangled chariot follows the flower-hung horses;
A young Muse with young loves clustered about her
ascends with me into the æther, . . .
And there is no high-road to the Muses.

Annalists will continue to record Roman reputations,
Celebrities from the Trans-Caucasus will belaud Roman celebrities
And expound the distentions of Empire,
But for something to read in normal circumstances?
For a few pages brought down from the forked hill unsullied?
I ask a wreath which will not crush my head.
And there is no hurry about it;
I shall have, doubtless, a boom after my funeral,
Seeing that long standing increases all things
regardless of quality.

And who would have known the towers
pulled down by a deal-wood horse;
Or of Achilles withstaying waters by Simois
Or of Hector spattering wheel-rims,

Or of Polydmantus, by Scamander, or Helenus and Deiphoibos?
Their door-yards would scarcely know them, or Paris.
Small talk O Ilion, and O Troad
twice taken by Oetian gods,
If Homer had not stated your case!

And I also among the later nephews of this city
shall have my dog's day,
With no stone upon my contemptible sepulchre;
My vote coming from the temple of Phoebus in Lycia, at Patara,
And in the meantime my songs will travel,
And the devirginated young ladies will enjoy them
when they have got over the strangeness,
For Orpheus tamed the wild beasts —
and held up the Threician river;
And Citharaon shook up the rocks by Thebes
and danced them into a bulwark at his pleasure,
And you, O Polyphemus? Did harsh Galatea almost
Turn to your dripping horses, because of a tune, under Aetna?
We must look into the matter.
Bacchus and Apollo in favour of it,
There will be a crowd of young women doing homage to my palaver,
Though my house is not propped up by Taenarian columns from Laconia (associated with Neptune and Cerberus),
Though it is not stretched upon gilded beams;
My orchards do not lie level and wide
as the forests of Phaecia,
the luxurious and Ionian,
Nor are my caverns stuffed stiff with a Marcian vintage,
My cellar does not date from Numa Pompilius,
Nor bristle with wine jars,
Nor is it equipped with a frigidaire patent;
Yet the companions of the Muses
will keep their collective nose in my books,

And weary with historical data, they will turn to my dance
tune.

Happy who are mentioned in my pamphlets,
the songs shall be a fine tomb-stone over their beauty.
But against this?
Neither expensive pyramids scraping the stars in their route,
Nor houses modelled upon that of Jove in East Elis,
Nor the monumental effigies of Mausolus,
are a complete elucidation of death.

Flame burns, rain sinks into the cracks
And they all go to rack ruin beneath the thud of the years
Stands genius a deathless adornment,
a name not to be worn out with the years.

RAMBLING AROUND POUND'S PROPERTIUS

Propertius Comes to Harvard Yard

At Choate, in 1931, it was not H.P. ("Hup-Hup") Arnold, the classics master, but the poet Dudley Fitts who started me on Propertius. "Hup," who skipped the part about Dido & Aeneas in the cave in the *Aeneid*, knew that "Integer Vitae" built character in boys but that the Elegiac Poets would not sit with the Head, whose great sermon on the Honest Sailor who reported an errant master was repeated annually to a cheering audience in chapel.

S.P.'s name came up a few days after I enrolled at the Ezuversity in Rapallo in 1934, and was loaned a marked-up copy of the Mueller edition. But I didn't get deep into what Pound had done with him until I was reading the Elegiac Poets with E.K. Rand — what a charming and learned man! And those were still the days when doctors made house calls and great professors invited students to dinner and served port.

Professor Rand was not a noddy like Prof. William Hale who reviewed the *Propertius* as a *translation* in *Poetry* magazine. His favorite work of modern poetry was Robert Bridges' *Testament of Beauty*. But he was willing to talk about Eliot and Pound, unlike his colleague the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric, Robert Hillyer, who was known to eject students from his classroom for mentioning their names. So I ventured to offer Rand a paper on the *Propertius*, this about 1937. With him I had no worry that the visits to his study where I could examine his classic texts printed by Aldus and Estienne and Didot would cease. I defined the *Homage* immediately as a transcription, but hedged with some comments about "egregious errors": "sitiens" as "sitting," "vota" as "vote" — and the "distortions" of the collage structure. Then I let fly with praise for Pound's "verbal valence" (we had our innocuous terminologies in those days too) in the "Nox mihi candida." Professor Rand was advised (as if he didn't know) that in the *Propertius* he could watch "the metamorphosis of observation into imagination," that Pound favored "terminal syzygies," but that (take

care!) "Propertius seems to have been an ill-disciplined person subject to rapid and violent changes of mood." However I went too far when I suggested that Augustus was Propertius' Sir Basil Zaharoff (Metevsky). That line was crossed out in red with no comment.

The comment at the end of my paper was: "A judicious evaluation. But a little more care with your syntax, please." And below that, "Cur tua praescripto sevecta est pagina gyro."?

Those Welsh Mines

According to Gallup, the *Propertius* first appeared in Pound's 1919 book *Quia Pauper Amavi,* which also contained "Langue d'Oc," "Moeurs Contemporaines," and three ur-cantos. When Pound translated the Latin phrase (from Ovid) for me as "love on the dole," I saw to what the title applied. Propertius was well-born but he lost his family estates when they were given to veterans, and he wrote "sollicitate tu causa pecunia vitae." In their London days the Pounds were living on Ezra's small literary jobs, Dorothy's allowance and an occasional $10 bill (that bought a lot then) in Homer's letters from Wyncote. Can not their situation support the thesis that Pound made *his* Propertius more anti-establishment than Propertius really was because of his own growing dislike of the banking system? "The bank makes it *ex nihil*" (233.46.75). Sullivan records that the *Homage* was completed in 1918. Pound did not meet Major Douglas in the office of the *New Age* until 1918, but he had been researching the causes of war since shortly after Gaudier's death.

I suspect that the "Welsh mines" passage may prove my point. "Cimbrorumque minas et benefacta Mari" means, more or less: "the threat of Cimbrian invasion (wild men from Wales pillaging the Roman settlements in Britain) and Marius's public service and the profit in defeating them." But Pound makes it " . . . Welsh mines and the profit Marus had out of them." "Minas" cannot mean "mines." No way. "Mines" would be "metalla."

But the line rang a bell with Ezra and he saw how he could use it to get at his enemies, the bankers and their military stooges. This sort of thing goes on constantly in the *Homage* — it is part of the mask mechanism — but it is seldom so clear-cut. Usually it is done in the service of one of the several kinds of irony and humor which give the poem its marvelous flavor.

In our correspondence Ezra teased me a good deal, usually referring to my "Haavud iggurance," and I sometimes teased him back. I wrote him in 1935 that those mines were really a bit too much, and had this reply: "The Homage is on a list of mine somewhere as a persona [which means he was writing under the guise or mask of another person]. D/n suppose S propertius hadn'd died/or had Ripvan Winkled. and come to and wrote a poem/In yanqui. I NEVER said the Homage was a translation. Some of it coincides/as if I rewrote a poem I had done twenty years ago/The Hardy [Thomas Hardy] prob/Hit it when he said it wd/have helped the boob reader if I had called it 'S.P. soliloquizes.' 'boob'/is not textual. Mr. Hardy's langwidg waz choicer. Continuin'/My contribution to classical scholarship if any/wd. consist in blasting the idea that Propertius wd. have been an editor of the New Republic/or that he was a moon-headed decorator/smaragdos chrysolithosve. As thesis it wd be that he had a bean/plus a bit of humor and irony which the desiccated do not see . . . Perhaps 'nowhere seeking to make or to avoid translation' wd. answer query."

On The Palatine Hill

Atra dies. One of my blackest. All during the shooting of Lawrence Pitkethly's documentary on Pound (as an old friend of Ezra's I was supposed to be the continuity figure, but the film editor left most of my continuations on the cutting room floor) as we traipsed in a van from troubadour country, through the Sacred Places and finally to Rome, I was dreaming of my Great Event. I had been promised that I could do the "Nox mihi candida"

on the Palatine Hill. The day came. I had rented a toga in the Via della Scrofula. The shooting went on. I waited. The light was fading. Lawrence was making more and more useless shots of memorial arches. (I think he is queer for arches.) "Lawrence," I pleaded, "you promised." The cameraman took a light reading. "It's too late for that now." "You can at least do it on tape," Lawrence said. I gave a magnificent declamation. And only then noticed that the tape was not running. I wasn't worth even a bit of tape. The film will be on PBS in 1986, but I don't care if you watch it. I was betrayed.

Die Stimme hinter dem Vorhang

I have a great admiration for Donald Davie. With R.P. Blackmur and John Espey he was one of the first critics to make high claims for Pound. In our present climate that sounds simple enough; but Espey told me the story of how his professors, when he announced that he would do his dissertation on Pound, begged him not to destroy his academic career before it had even begun.

My admiration for Davie recently increased when I heard him do a superb hatchet job, so elegant and so witty, on some neo-Marxists and post-structuralists whom Terry had imported to the Pound Conference at Orono. I felt, as Davie punctured those gaseous balloons of non-signification, that he was speaking for Ez, who was muttering "Cat-piss and porcupines!!" It was a bravura performance. Davie is also a fine poet; the master always told me that good poets were the ones qualified to explain poetry.

But there have been moments when D.D. puzzled me. First at Noel Stock's conference at Toledo in 1971 when he remarked that Lawrence and Williams — two of my heroes — were a pernicious influence on his writer-students. And I was puzzled when I read in his books on Pound that the *Propertius* was composed in "Babu English," or "translatorese." I had spent some time working in India, doing cultural Boy Scout jobs for the Ford Founda-

tion. This had meant a lot of time in the offices of minor functionaries of the Ministry of Education, tedious hours while the punkahs whined and barefoot but turbaned peons were sent scurrying after file folders. I had those bureaucratic intonations pretty well fixed in my head; they were indeed curious, but I could not relate them to what I heard in the *Homage*. There was a correspondence of idiom in the "political" passages, where Pound is using the "Latinate polysyllables" to deride the Establishment, but that seemed to me a matter of vocabulary not of poetic cadence. Who or what was it that I was hearing? Or was it only Pound's lines of prose in the *Cantos*?

I put the problem on hold. And it wasn't until 1983 when we went to Hexham in Northumbria to interview that grand old man Basil Bunting (R.I.P.) for Pitkethly's documentary that I found what seemed a satisfactory answer. That was for me an historic day. We had set up the lights and the camera in the living room of the cottage. "The Bas" sparkled his eyes at us and talked away, as only he could talk, while he nipped at the Scotch we had brought him.

There were some remarkable stories about his life in Persia, as a seaman on the Murmansk run and in the RAF in Italy, good tales about Pound, but most of the talk was on poetry, particularly melopoeia. He told us that when Pound came to London in 1908 "he was forty years behind" and that "his father — and his mother — were Rossetti." But he knew that Yeats was "the great living poet to go after." Some ten years later Yeats would tell Bunting that the *Propertius*, and especially the "Nox mihi candida," had the best *vers libre* structure yet done in English. It was, Bunting said, "in the *Homage* that Pound discovered how to organize a poem on the model of music so that every line grows out of the line before by modification. The effect is very much like the sonata form." "Was there," I asked, "a basic rhythm?" There was indeed and it turned out to be — Whitman. I was amazed. Pound had never mentioned Whitman that I can recall so I had never made that connection. Bunting went on to recite the beginning of "Out of the cradle endlessly rocking," beating time with his finger; then he did part of the "Nox mihi candida." The echo was

clear to all of us. What clinches the argument for me was his telling us that once, years before, he had gotten stuck reciting the Whitman to Ezra; then Pound had picked up and carried through to the end without a pause. The poem was permanently in his head.

That was a great day in Hexham. We had lunch in the village pub, then continued the shooting. At about three the bottle of Scotch was empty; "The Bas's" chin declined to his chest and he slipped softly into slumber. We had had a course in the bond between poetry and music, and what Pound had made with it. Only a fraction of the interview found its way into the film, but the out-takes are safe and I hope to have a video cassette edited from them.

The Sounds of the Old Words

I ask whether some of the beaneries may be paddling the young up shit creek? Is poking a computer as conducive to the formation of style as reading Plato or Vergil? (And by style I don't mean this parody of E.P. at the lunch table; I mean the way Leon Edel or Harry Levin writes prose.) I submit that style is heard in the head as it is put down, and that those sounds come from reading the right texts in youth: the classics in the originals, the King James Version, even the Gettysburg Address.

When I was invited to do Pound & Williams at Brown I warned the students that I would not turn in a grade until I had heard them recite 4 lines of Latin. (My wife said this reminded her of Radcliffe when the girls had to swim across the pool to be graduated.) I let the students choose anything that pleased them, even Catullus 80 if they liked that sort of thing. I simply wanted them to have in their heads the sound of some good Latin words and how the words move in the line, "rubbing themselves" on each other forwards and backwards.

Since we were doing the *Propertius*, most chose from him, and

the favorite turned out to be the "dum nos fata sinunt," lines that echo in my own head though I suppose they are sentimental.

"dum nos fata sinunt, oculos satiemus amore
nox tibi longa venit, nec reditura dies"

"While our fates twine together, sate we our eyes with love;
For a long night comes upon you
and a day when no day returns."

Not long afterward I was Loebing my way through Tibullus and was startled to come on exactly the same line. I even found one in Catullus that isn't far from it. What does this tell us about the literary life in Rome? Were the boys cribbing from each other? Or paying compliments by imitation? Or was this a poetic convention of the time? John Speirs points out that many scholars believe that much of Propertius was drawn from Callimachus — hard to prove since so little Callimachus survives. And could it have been Kenner who remarked that what the Elegiac Poets *say* is not extremely profound; what they do with the words gives their poetry its charge.

A Backward Glance

Not everyone has seen Pound's 1911 (*Canzoni*) translation of Propertius, III, 26, because it was dropped from *Personae*, though it is now in the *Collected Early Poems*. It bears looking at to see how much Pound improved in six years.

PRAYER FOR HIS LADY'S LIFE

Here let thy clemency, Persephone, hold firm,
Do thou, Pluto, bring here no greater harshness.
So many thousand beauties are gone down to Avernus
Ye might let one remain above with us.

With you is Iope, with you the white-gleaming Tyro,
With you is Europa and the shameless Pasiphae,
And all the fair from Troy and all from Achaia,
From the sundered realms, of Thebes and of aged Priamus;
And all the maidens of Rome, as many as they were,
They died and the greed of your flame consumes them.

Here let thy clemency, Persephone, hold firm,
Do thou, Pluto, bring here no greater harshness.
So many thousand fair are gone down to Avernus,
Ye might let one remain above with us.

Look at IX, 2 (page 223 of *Personae*) to see what happened. Some of the mythological fustian has been cut, to advantage, but the great change is this: the tame and trite "So many thousand beauties are gone down to Avernus" has become the superb "There are enough women in hell,/quite enough beautiful women" for "sunt apud infernos tot milia formosarum." It's like going from Sully Prudhomme to Laforgue.

Nuggets

T.S. Eliot (1919)

"The *Homage* is a new *persona*, a creation of a new character, re-creating Propertius in himself, and himself in Propertius."

Prof. W. G. Hale (1919)

"Mr Pound is incredibly ignorant of Latin. He has of course a perfect right to be, but not if he translates from it. The result of his ignorance is that much of what he makes his author say is unintelligible. . . . If Mr Pound were a professor of Latin, there would be nothing left for him but suicide."

E.P. (in a letter to Orage, 1919)

"Hale pretends to read Latin, but has apparently never *understood* anything but syntax and never seen the irony of Propertius. . . . Re decadence: We all know that Propertius went to mid-week prayer meeting. . . . If I were, however, a professor of Latin in Chicago, I should probably have to resign on divulging the fact that Propertius occasionally copulavit, i.e. rogered the lady to whom he was not legally wedded."

Robert Nichols (1920)

"In place of the quiet and tender irony we are accustomed to see upon the face of Thomas Campion's favourite Latin poet we behold a mask of gaiety and elegiac irony, sometimes almost saturnine. . . . The voice is not that of the professional gramophone, being at least a live voice. That is, however, I fear, all that can be said for the version. . . . Mr Pound is not, never has been and almost, I might hazard, never will be, a poet. He is too hard, too clever; he has yet to learn that poetry does not so much glitter as shine."

Wyndham Lewis (in reply to the Nichols review, 1920)

"Mr. Pound, without being a pedant, may conceivably know that Chaucer, Landor, Ben Jonson, and many contemporaries of Rowlandson, found other uses for classic texts than that of making literal English versions of them. Or, again, that the parody of Yeats. . . . and the mention of Wordsworth . . . would have indicated to a sensitive or less biassed critic than Mr Pound . . . had some other aim than that of providing a crib for schoolboys or undergraduates."

Ford Madox Ford (1926)

"What is the *Homage* but a prolonged satire upon our own day, as if Propertius should come to New York or London . . ."

R.P. Blackmur (1933)

"What is characteristic of this poem more than its attitudes toward love and toward the poet's profession, is the elegance of the language in which these attitudes are expressed. By elegance is meant . . . a consistent choice of words and their arrangement such as to exemplify a single taste . . ."

" . . . the element of conversational, colloquial ease used formally, almost rhetorically to heighten the seriousness of the verse."

Hugh Kenner (1951)

"By 1917 Pound had forged a new language; not only the expression, but the sensibility brought to the Latin, is liberated from Victorian emotional cliché. . . a block of speech and perception new to the English poetic tradition, and a use of language that responds to the pressures of perception with (Ching Ming) accuracy and adequacy."

"Pound . . . brought to Propertius' Elegies a sensibility alert to elegant cynicism, informed by Laforgue's dealings with pretentious sentiment and pretentious bombast alike."

"The deliberate *collage* of poker-faced misreadings performed by Pound in certain portions of this poem should perhaps be connected with the exploration of these zones of consciousness initiated by Joyce five years later."

" . . . the enormous freedom and range of tone, the ironic weight, the multiple levels of tongue-in-cheek self-deprecation everywhere present in the *Propertius*."

(1971)

"The *Homage* . . . was achieved by a mind filled with James's

prose . . . Not only the ghost of the Latin elegiac couplet presides over its way of dividing discourse, but the great ghost also, 'phantom with weighted motion', that drank (he wrote thenabouts) 'the tone of things,' and spaced its discourse with suspenseful deliberateness."

(1983, from the documentary interview transcript)

JL: Why was Pound attracted to Propertius?

HK: A lot of things came together . . . the fascination with the poet whom the establishment has missed . . . Maecenas, the Ford Foundation of his time, didn't give him a fellowship . . . the wars and rumors of wars in Rome which rhymes with the British imperial propaganda of 1917 . . . and then finally there was the opportunity presented by the enormous number of Latin words embedded in the English language that he could use in the poem . . . from which he got a strange tone of abstract supercilious . . . just what he wanted.

CANTO XLIX

For the seven lakes, and by no man these verses:
Rain; empty river; a voyage,
Fire from frozen cloud, heavy rain in the twilight
Under the cabin roof was one lantern.
The reeds are heavy; bent;
and the bamboos speak as if weeping.

Autumn moon; hills rise about lakes
against sunset
Evening is like a curtain of cloud,
a blur above ripples: and through it
sharp long spikes of the cinnamon,
a cold tune amid reeds.
Behind hill the monk's bell
borne on the wind.
Sail passed here in April; may return in October
Boat fades in silver; slowly;
Sun blaze alone on the river.

Where wine flag catches the sunset
Sparse chimneys smoke in the cross light

Comes then snow scur on the river
And a world is covered with jade
Small boat floats like a lanthorn,
The flowing water clots as with cold. And at San Yin
they are a people of leisure.

Wild geese swoop to the sand-bar,
Clouds gather about the hole of the window
Broad water; geese line out with the autumn
Rooks clatter over the fishermen's lanthorns,

A light moves on the north sky line;
where the young boys prod stones for shrimp.

In seventeen hundred came Tsing to these hill lakes.
A light moves on the south sky line.

State by creating riches shd. thereby get into debt?
This is infamy; this is Geryon.
This canal goes still to TenShi
though the old king built it for pleasure

K E I	M E N	R A N	K E I
K I U	M A N	M A N	K E I
JITSU	GETSU	K O	K W A
T A N	F U K U	T A N	K A I

Sun up; work
sundown; to rest
dig well and drink of the water
dig field; eat of the grain
Imperial power is? and to us what is it?

The fourth; the dimension of stillness.
And the power over wild beasts.

SOME NOTES: INTO THE SERE AND YELLOW

While an undergraduate I memorized from the *Selected Poems* the first six stanzas of this canto and its concluding two lines. In later years, I would repeat them aloud for they were pacifying like some of the psalms I learned as a boy. For all the description here, there was, nevertheless, a satisfying otherworldly melody and emptiness to the landscape. There was also a mystery.

The late autumn, late evening and wintry village scene that accounts for the first six stanzas of the Seven Lakes Canto *was* my mystery! I wanted to know where I was in time and space. The Pound scholars didn't know. Some said it was the province of Hunan, a rich lake district in China. Some said it was a Taoist fancy, an imaginary place outside of time. The first notion is reasonable, for the original six stanzas of the canto are involved very perversely, with poems, anonymous poems ("and by no man these verses"), that Pound and a friend, Pao-sun Tseng, translated in spring 1928, in Rapallo. The anonymous poems are from a Chinese picture book that had long been in the possession of Pound's father. The picture book contained Chinese and Japanese poems adjoined by painted scenes of Hunan Province.

But are we in the Hunan? This province in China enjoys mild winters; once every five years or so, tea bushes might be singed with the cold. But in the Seven Lakes Canto, our village is suffering a blanketing frost, ice in the canals, and snow. The seven lakes ought to be a clue but the literature says there is no configuration of seven lakes anywhere in Hunan. The answer is in the last of the first six stanzas:

> A light moves on the north sky line;
> where the young boys prod stones for shrimp.
> In seventeen hundred came Tsing to these hill lakes.
> A light moves on the south sky line.

In seventeen hundred came Tsing to these hill lakes. Tsing is the 22nd Dynasty; its ruler in 1700 is K'ang-hsi, a benevolent emperor who reminds one of a cross between Augustine and Thomas Jefferson. K'ang-hsi was born at a critical time in the history of

the Manchu regime; the fallen Ming loyalists, a bad crowd, were still hiding in small numbers in the Hunan and the Ming eunuchs of the Office of Household were still, sadly, influential. K'ang-hsi was born in the Forbidden City of Peking, was passed to the Imperial throne in 1661, and was not yet seven years old. The government was not in the hands of this boy but rather was trusted to some villainous Manchu courtiers, the most powerful of whom was Oboi, the dictator. At fifteen, K'ang-hsi with the aid of the Grand Dowager Empress and a roomful of boy wrestlers succeeded in arresting the monster Oboi. K'ang-hsi now set about radical tax reforms, becoming a much loved figure in the eyes of the peasants. K'ang-hsi respected the Confucianists, had an interest in many religions, and adored the arts and education. He was a revered figure in Pound's early personal mythology, a representative of imperial enlightenment — it is K'ang-hsi and not Mussolini, as has been argued, who is the adored personage of this canto.

But what of my mystery? What brought K'ang-hsi to the landscape of this canto in 1700? It was K'ang-hsi who took the huge province of Hu-kuang and broke it ("A light moves on the north sky line . . . A light moves on the south sky line"); he broke Hu-Kuang into two smaller provinces, the Hupeh (north of the lakes and the Yang-tze) and the Hunan (South of the lakes and the Yang-tze). The Hupeh is several hundred miles to the north of the scenes from our Chinese picture book. It has short but very rigorous winters. It has a hilly lake district. After dividing the Hu-kuang the Emperor, K'ang-hsi, visited (circa 1700) numerous remote towns in the Hupeh. The demarcation was solemnized and the Tsing had come to these hill lakes.

The ancient historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien wrote of the people of the Hupeh region: their children collect crayfish, the land is tilled by fire and hoed with rain — they are self-sufficient with the wild cinnamon. These are the ancestors of the people of my mystery village. They lived on either side of the river Han Shui, the second largest river in the Hupeh. And, friends, on either side of this river is a constellation of seven lakes.

* * *

But why do I insist on a reality of place for this poem? I believe Pound scholarship continues in its indulgence of this canto by ignoring the value of stanzas seven through nine. The reality of place is important because this is a poem of harsh realities raised only by the beauty of a very cold season. The Pound scholars find the arrival of Tsing a shattering moment in the next to the last line of the sixth stanza — most say it is a sobering moment that breaks the charm of the poem's pastoral imagery while returning us to the Twentieth Century — in fact, it is the beginning of a wild, eccentric exordium. Now, that moment of the poem was so difficult for me in my youth that I stopped learning the canto in consecutive stanzas and jumped to the orphic benediction that closes the poem. But as troubling as the sixth stanza is for people, it is only so because we failed to go on to the seventh stanza while knowing what Pound knew. The sixth stanza opens or passes logically to the seventh stanza of public works:

> State by creating riches shd. thereby get into debt?
> This is infamy; this is Geryon.
> This canal goes still to TenShi
> though the old king built it for pleasure.

Here we have the familiar usury obsession. Geryon is the monster who symbolizes fraud in the eighth circle of Dante's Hell. He is also a double for the old king who builds for mere pleasure. The old king is not a benevolent figure, though some scholars have taken him for just that. The last of the Sui Dynasty emperors, he reached the throne by assassinating his father and brother. He set about ornamental public works that left the people starvelings. He began a building program that would have exhausted the combined talents of Moses and Albert Speer. He weighed property taxes against landless peasants; some of this money was diverted to Taoist alchemists to create an elixir to extend his life. Pound knew this, and had little use for the Emperor, Sui Yang Ti, and even less use for the slither of his Taozers. (It is silly by the

way to study this canto simply in terms of Taoist contentment — this is a poem of opposing yet reconciled beliefs, a poem of synizesis.) Anyway, the spendthrift ruler, Sui Yang Ti, built canals in the Hupeh region; they were poorly constructed and would only support vessels of three feet draft. But a future emperor dredged these canals, making them a renewed source of pleasure while making them a profound conveyance for commerce. This new king was none other than the Emperor K'ang-hsi, our paradigm of imperial function who is introduced in the previous stanza. Mere beauty is not enough for this canto — Pound scholars rightly suggest that this poem carries the notion that the best things in life are both free and aesthetically pleasing, but the poem is weighted equally with another familiar and sobering Confucianist notion: the necessary things of life are rarely free and are obtained only through a difficult and ennobling struggle with the natural world.

Once K'ang-hsi has been introduced to the poem at the end of the sixth stanza, we must only wait for the second shoe to drop. This sounds like a mistake in protocol, for we are in Pound's world of juxtaposition without copula, floating with a broken fantasia of tetrameter lines. But there is no mistake — the new king enters the poem of lights with an escort of major cardinal lights; the old king enters the poem already shamed in the procession by who precedes him, the disgusting three-bodied monster Geryon who had his cattle seized by the Greek wonder, Heracles. The old king, Sui Yang Ti, was similiarly undone by an unlucky but large-hearted Korean prince in the last year of his reign.

* * *

Stanzas eight and nine are interesting similarly and are also misunderstood. The eighth stanza is a romanization of the Japanese pronunciations for a poem by the ancient Chinese Emperor Shun (2254-05 B.C.) who belongs to the exquisite, painted pottery culture. He is a benign shadow of K'ang-hsi. Why is his

poem, which Pound found in the Fenollosa notebooks, left untranslated? It is suggested that this is done to estrange us, in the Twentieth Century, from the harmonious pastoralisms of a lost, now conjured time. Almost the same mistake we made about the difficult *came Tsing to these hill lakes.* Neither moment is meant to alienate the reader; just the opposite, they beckon. To explain I must go on to the ninth stanza which is a peasant song Pound found translated, once again in the Fenollosa notebooks.

> Sun up; work
> sundown; to rest
> dig well and drink of the water
> dig field; eat of the grain
> Imperial power is? and to us what is it?

Again, why is the previous stanza, Emperor Shun's poem, left untranslated? Because it stands for divine wisdom, for breeding archetypes of imperial ministry that combine with the mysterious movements of sun and moon, things we can never understand. But, yet, the eighth stanza *is* translated to a vulgar plane where we can understand joyfully, quietly through the peasant song of the ninth stanza with its simple ordeals and its sunset and inevitable moonrise. What is imperial power to us, the whole canto makes it clear: it is accords of humility, surrender and peace, orderliness, hard work and value. Most ephiphanies are concealed in grim or mundane realities. The confucianist notion of the imperial is after all an emperor who is not divine himself; his divinity depends on the proper performance of his duties. This translates to our plane of existence in the two material forces (Yin/Yang) and in the five agents (metal, wood, fire, water and earth). Principle or value are the laws of nature, nature is, well . . . just the fact, nature.

I have left Pound's irascibility out of my discussion, for gratefully I find little of it here, only perhaps the fantasy of the two stray sparks of geography: *Sai Yin* which is a revery for a southern county in coastal China and *TenShi* which refers to the old western lake that represents the exhaustion of the Yang-tze. They are not important. What is important, and one of the more

astonishing things about this canto, is the leap from the 1928 translations of the poems in the picture book to the 1937 fragments that cohere making the first six stanzas. With some ambitious tinkering great reversals are achieved: we go from images of spring to images threatening winter, from a prosperous region south of the lakes to an unlikely region north of the lakes, from a bucolic Tao to a sober Neo-confucianism, to utter stillness. The unflinching artistry of these *translations*, or reversals, is part of the experience and knowledge of the poem though it is not at all a weight borne by the text.

* * *

But now we come to the benediction: we come into the *sere and yellow* of the last lines of the canto.

> The fourth; the dimension of stillness.
> And the power over wild beasts.

What about the fourth dimension and its still point and is it resonant with the seven lakes in Chinese philosophy? The septenary *is* resonant, is known through the directions of space of which there are seven: two opposite directions for each dimension, plus the still center which is often accepted as a dimension in and of itself — *it is therefore, the fourth and transcendent*. Seven is sacred to the Chinese for there are seven colors; seven foods to be gathered in the field; there are seven possible landscapes; the seven planets; and the most desirable of amulets is the lotus with its seven leaves. Also, seven is empty in the contemplative sense, as with the river of this canto's opening two lines.

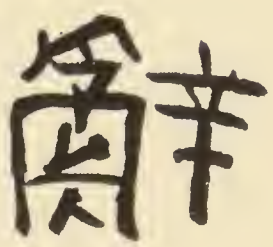
K'ang-hsi once remarked that it is impossible not to find the world evil, but that it is a waste of time to do so. Pound came to the dimension of stillness in his self-enforced silence of the later years. In the Chinese picture books the seasons run most often from spring to winter but winter is not just the fourth season. It is also, I believe, the fourth dimension of stillness, where the beasts sleep and man sleeps or is unhurried. And for the Chinese,

especially for the people of a poor region like Hupeh, it was a time for stillbirths, madness and famine. But it was not to be feared if you were in accord with it. And its overture was the lovely minimal music of this canto's first six stanzas: the music of bamboo, cinnamon spikes, and the dark rooks taking flight.

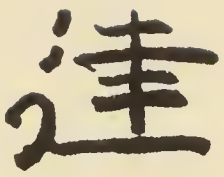
CANTO LXXIX

MOON, cloud, tower, a patch of the battistero
all of a whiteness,
dirt pile as per the Del Cossa inset
think not that you wd/gain if their least caress
were faded from my mind
I had not loved thee half so well
Loved I not womankind"
So Salzburg reopens
lit a flame in my thought that the years
Amari—li Am—ar—i—li!
and her hair gone white from the loss of him
and she not yet thirty.
On her wedding day and then thus, for the next time,
at the Spielhaus,
. . . might have been two years later.
Or Astafieva inside the street doors of the Wigmore
and wd/not have known her
undoubtedly wd/have put in the cart)
present Mr G. Scott whistling Lili Marlene
with positively less musical talent
than that of any other man of colour
whom I have ever encountered
but with bonhomie and good humour
(to Goedel in memoriam)
Sleek head that saved me out of one chaos
and I hear that G. P. has salmoned thru all of it.
Où sont? and who will come to the surface?
And Pétain not to be murdered 14 to 13
after six hours' discussion
Indubitably, indubitably re/Scott
I like a certain number of shades in my landscape
as per/"doan' tell no one I made you that table"
or Whiteside:
"ah certainly dew lak dawgs,

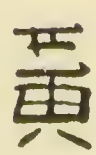
ah goin' tuh wash you"
(no, not to the author, to the canine unwilling in question)
with 8 birds on a wire
or rather on 3 wires, Mr Allingham
The new Bechstein is electric
and the lark squawk has passed out of season
whereas the sight of a good nigger is cheering
the bad'uns wont look you straight
Guard's cap quattrocento passes *a cavallo*
on horseback thru landscape Cosimo Tura
or, as some think, Del Cossa;
up stream to delouse and down stream for the same purpose
seaward
different lice live in different waters
some minds take pleasure in counterpoint
pleasure in counterpoint
and the later Beethoven on the new Bechstein,
or in the Piazza S. Marco for example
finds a certain concordance of size
not in the concert hall;
can that be the papal major sweatin' it out to the bumm drum?
what castrum romanum, what
"went into winter quarters"
is under us?
as the young horse whinnies against the tubas
in contending for certain values
(Janequin per esempio, and Orazio Vechii or Bronzino)
Greek rascality against Hagoromo
Kumasaka vs/vulgarity
no sooner out of Troas
than the damn fools attacked Ismarus of the Cicones
4 birds on 3 wires, one bird on one
the imprint of the intaglio depends
in part on what is pressed under it
the mould must hold what is poured into it
in
discourse



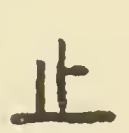
what matters is



to get it across e poi basta
5 of 'em now on 2;
on 3; 7 on 4
thus what's his name
and the change in writing the song books
5 on 3 aulentissima rosa fresca
so they have left the upper church at Assisi
but the Goncourt shed certain light on the
french revolution
"paak you djeep oveh there"
the bacon-rind banner alias the Washington arms
floats over against Ugolino
in San Stefano dei Cavalieri
God bless the Constitution
and *save* it
"the value thereof"
that is the crux of the matter
and god damn the perverters
and if Attlee attempts a Ramsey
"Leave the Duke, go for the gold"
"in less than a geological epoch"
and the Fleet that triumphed at Salamis
and Wilkes's fixed the price per loaf
ἦθος
Athene cd/have done with more sex appeal
caesia oculi
"Pardon me, γλαύξ"
("Leave it, I'm not a fool.")
mah?
"The price is three altars, multa."
"paak you djeep oveh there."
2 on 2



what's the name of that bastard? D'Arezzo, Gui d'Arezzo
notation

3 on 3
chiacchierona the yellow bird
to rest 3 months in bottle
(auctor) 

by the two breasts of Tellus
Bless my buttons, a staff car/
si come avesse l'inferno in gran dispitto
Capanaeus
with 6 on 3, swallow-tails
as from the breasts of Helen, a cup of white gold
2 cups for three altars. Tellus γέα feconda
"each one in the name of its god"
mint, thyme and basilicum,
the young horse whinnies against the sound of the bumm band;
to that 'gadgett,' and to the production and the slaughter
(on both sides) in memoriam
'Hell! don't they get a break for the whistle?"
and if the court be not the centre of learning . . .
in short the snot of pejorocracy . . .
tinsel gilded
of fat fussy old woman
and fat snorty old stallions
"half dead at the top"
My dear William B. Y. your ½ was too moderate
"pragmatic pig" (if goyim) will serve for 2 thirds of it
to say nothing of the investment of funds in the Yu-en-mi
and similar ventures
small arms 'n' chemicals
whereas Mr Keith comes nearest to Donatello's
O Lynx, my love, my lovely lynx,
Keep watch over my wine pot,
Guard close my mountain still
Till the god come into this whiskey.
Manitou, god of lynxes, remember our corn.
Khardas, god of camels

what the deuce are you doing here?
I beg your pardon . . .
"Prepare to go on a journey."
"I . . ."

"Prepare to go on a journey."
or to count sheep in Phoenician,
How is it far if you think of it?
So they said to Lidya: no, your body-guard is not the
town executioner
the executioner is not here for the moment
the fellow who rides beside your coachman
is just a cossak who executes . . .
Which being the case, her holding dear H. J.
(Mr. James, Henry) literally by the buttom-hole . . .
in those so consecrated surroundings
(a garden in the Temple, no less)
and saying, *for once*, the right thing
namely: "Cher maître"
to his chequed waistcoat, the Princess Bariatinsky,
as the fish-tails said to Odysseus, ἐνὶ Τροίῃ,

The moon has a swollen cheek
and when the morning sun lit up the shelves and battalions
of the West, cloud over cloud
Old Ez folded his blankets
Neither Eos nor Hesperus has suffered wrong at my hands

O Lynx, wake Silenus and Casey
shake the castagnettes of the bassarids,
the mountain forest is full of light
the tree-comb red-gilded
Who sleeps in the field of lynxes
in the orchard of Maelids?
(with great blue marble eyes

"because he likes to," the cossak)
Salazar, Scott, Dawley on sick call
Polk, Tyler, half the presidents and Calhoun
"Retaliate on the capitalists" sd/Calhoun "of the North"
ah yes, when the ideas were clearer
debts to people in N. Y. city
and on the hill of the Maelids
in the close garden of Venus
asleep amid serried lynxes
set wreathes on Priapus Ἴακχος, Io! Κύθηρα, Io!
having root in the equities
Io!
and you can make 5000 dollars a year
all you have to do is to make one trip up country
then come back to Shanghai
and send in an annual report
as to the number of converts
Sweetland on sick call
ἐλέησον Kyrie eleison
each under his fig tree
or with the smell of fig leaves burning
so shd / be fire in winter
with fig wood, with cedar, and pine burrs

O Lynx keep watch on my fire.

So Astafieva had conserved the tradition
From Byzance and before then
Manitou remember this fire
O lynx, keep the phylloxera from my grape vines
Ἰακχε, Ἰακχε, Χαῖρε, AOI
"Eat of it not in the under world"
See that the sun or the moon bless thy eating
Κόρη, Κόρη, for the six seeds of an error
or that the stars bless thy eating

O Lynx, guard this orchard,
Keep from Demeter's furrow

This fruit has a fire within it,
Pomona, Pomona
No glass is clearer than are the globes of this flame
what sea is clearer than the pomegranate body
holding the flame?
Pomona, Pomona,

Lynx, keep watch on this orchard
That is named Melagrana
or the Pomegranate field
The sea is not clearer in azure
Nor the Heliads bringing light

Here are lynxes Here are lynxes,
Is there a sound in the forest
of pard or of bassarid
or crotale or of leaves moving?

Cythera, here are lynxes
Will the scrub-oak burst into flower?
There is a rose vine in this underbrush
Red? white? No, but a colour between them
When the pomegranate is open and the light falls
half thru it

Lynx, beware of these vine-thorns
O Lynx, γλαυκῶπις coming up from the olive yards,
Kuthera, here are Lynxes and the clicking of crotales
There is a stir of dust from old leaves
Will you trade roses for acorns
Will lynxes eat thorn leaves?
What have you in that wine jar?
ἰχώρ, for lynxes?

Maelid and bassarid among lynxes;
how many? There are more under the oak trees,
We are here waiting the sun-rise
and the next sunrise
for three nights amid lynxes. For three nights
of the oak-wood
and the vines are thick in their branches
no vine lacking flower,
no lynx lacking a flower rope
no Maelid minus a wine jar
this forest is named Melagrana

O lynx, keep the edge on my cider
Keep it clear without cloud

We have lain here amid kalicanthus and sword-flower
The heliads are caught in wild rose vine
The smell of pine mingles with rose leaves
O lynx, be many
of spotted fur and sharp ears.
O lynx, have your eyes gone yellow,
with spotted fur and sharp ears?

Therein is the dance of the bassarids
Therein are centaurs
And now Priapus with Faunus
The Graces have brought Ἀφροδίτην
Her cell is drawn by ten leopards
O lynx, guard my vineyard
As the grape swells under vine leaf
Ἥλιος is come to our mountain
there is a red glow in the carpet of pine spikes

O lynx, guard my vineyard
As the grape swells under vine leaf

This Goddess was born of sea-foam
She is lighter than air under Hesperus
δεινὰ εἶ, Κύθηρα
terrible in resistance
Κόρη καὶ Δήλια καὶ Μαῖα
trine as praeludio
Κύπρις Ἀφρόδιτη
a petal lighter than sea-foam
Κύθηρα

aram
nemus
vult

O puma, sacred to Hermes, Cimbica servant of Helios.

ALBA LXXIX

Hilda Doolittle, who was always Pound-foolish, liked to think that the Pisan canto, LXXIX, which begins, "Moon, cloud, tower . . ." was written for her. The image of the lynx, which Pound employs in the poem, suggested herself to H.D. She bore, as her biographer Barbara Guest points out, a discernable physical resemblance to the cat. She coupled this, as evidence, with the fact that Pound's lifelong nickname for her was "Dryad." Dryads aren't lynxes, after all, but both possess *sagesse*, the natural smarts of beast and nymph. Somehow, sagesse did not prevent H.D. from reading herself unbidden into the text. Her sense of the mythic differed from Pound's in one crucial aspect. Her sense of deific determinism was personal, her private pantheon peopled with gods who were a lot like herself and her friends. Pound's mythos flowed from the opposite sense of the sacred: divine standards absorbed the personal and exacted homage of it — and Pound was nothing if not a worshipper.

In LXXIX, in fact, Pound *is* on the trail of a woman, but not, I believe, a personal memory of a mortal woman. Instead, he courts his familiar Provençal Lady, the Lady who was an idea, a metaphor: light-as-wisdom. It is poignant to the reader of the cantos to observe that as Pound lost personal and public power, as his morality was questioned in a national court, he clung to, in fact intensified, his belief in the pure salvation of this metaphor.

And as his swashbuckling joy in his personae of the past diminished, The Lady stood by him — and even as he spoke finally of "an old bitch gone in the teeth, a botched civilization" — he stood by The Lady.

In the canto in question, he is "Ez," as close as he comes to a public "self-voice." He is no longer Bertran de Born, Arnaut Daniel, Odysseus, Sextus Propertius or the Seafarer Bard. In this one, he is Ezra Pound, traitor, in a tiger cage, on view like an animal in the U.S. Army Detention Center in the village of Metato, north of Pisa. He could smell the sea. His concrete-floored cell was open to the sky.

What is most amazing to me about LXXIX is that it consists entirely of *counterpoint*. The major "harmony" is (necessarily) only implied and it is a grim sound, or lack of: the unrelenting silence of enforced solitude. He got the tone precisely right — the thoughts of all prisoners are contrapunctual. In prison, the present is stuck in the present, like a needle stuck in a groove. To "hear" it unremittingly is madness.

And "Ez" is not mad, he clings to sanity by establishing the poem emphatically in the temporal. (Though not the temporal of clocks and watches, he has neither — he is acutely aware of sky-time.) It is night-coming-on-morning (moon, cloud, tower), he busily compares a camp obstacle fence to a Francesco del Cossa inset panel, he paraphrases Lovelace, he "sings" a song composed by one of the inventors of opera, he thinks of Mozart's wife, of Serafina Astafieva, of William Carlos Williams, he provides an ugly bit of blackface — then a guard's cap "quattrocento passes a cavallo."

Then he says it outright: *some minds take pleasure in counterpoint.* ure Then, with irresistible, other-shoe-falling irony, he repeats in "pleascounterpoint."

He notices the birds on the wires above. His observations of their lightings forms a visual contrapunctual. They flock and disperse like notes on a staff. "Lark squawk out of season" is a sad nod to Provençal and also calls up his thoughts in 1911 on Arnaut's realism, oddly apt now; "no gardens where three birds sing on every bough." A young horse whinnies against the off-key tuning of a band: "4 birds on 3 wires, one bird on one . . .," it goes on. The mind forcing itself to compose its silent music, like the shifting background of birds against sky — *in the sequence of the musical phrase, not the metronome.* The metronome insists on the present, its mindless tock emptying the universe of import. No. A form must be found that will *hold*, will suffice to enclose this experience in meaning. "The mould must hold what is poured in it." And as Cavalcanti: "Thought cuts through thought with a clean edge."

The birds group and re-group and Pound reflects that the Americans, bombing their way through Italy have "left the upper

church at Assisi." The sense of upper church, rose windows, rose light, gives us the first hint that this canto is an aubade. As a staff car pulls up by "the two breasts of Tellus" (Helen), as he calls the mountains in his view, the sky opens majestically behind the jostling assemblage of his thoughts. And then the poem turns toward a great dawn-song (the section H.D. wished most to claim), the litany-invocation of the Muse that begins, "O Lynx, my love, my lovely lynx . . ."

Pound counted on a lynx being a lynx in the poem *and* a manifestation of a divine presence in nature. It mattered that the light-colored cat with the pale blinking eyes evokes both the Greek "leukos" and ηειδδεζν, "to see." "To see," any reference at all to eyes in the cantos is a segue-way to the Lady. Usually to Aphrodite, who is known by the emblem of her eyes in the cantos. But then there are the eyes of Athena, flashing through the leaves. As Pound said in a letter (quoting Allen Upward):

> . . . she was the owl-eyed goddess,
> the lightning that blinks like an owl.

The "lightning" is here in the blinking eyes, the counterpoint of darkness, then sudden blinding light, or as the olive leaves, showing their dark side, then their light, then, as Donald Davie has pointed out, *Paradisio* itself, which is jagged, fragmented, *spezzato*:

> but is jagged
> For a flash,
> for an hour.
> Then agony,
> then an hour.
> (from "Rock Drill," Canto LXXXXII)

When Pound says "Prepare to go on a journey," he is not just being funny, flip Ulysses. He is saying goodbye to himself, knowing he will never be the same, again. "Ez" will be taken back to the U.S., the country he fled and which obsessed him through forty years of expatriation — to stand trial for treason. And then, most certainly, he will be someone else.

The chilling effect of these lines ("Keep watch over my wine pot, / Guard close my mountain still") despite the lulling beauty of the language, goes straight to the bone. He uses the image of the mountain still (a filling vat of moonshine *and* his life's work) which he begs the lynx to guard, "till the god come into this whiskey."

When will the god come into this whiskey? Pound clearly believed that the Lady, whose white light stands at the center of the cantos, that the cantos themselves, would, if not exonerate, explain him. A canto like LXXIX could certainly have clarified his position, for it shows everything haywire and despicable about his "misunderstandings" (his "misdemeanor" as he called it) — coupled with his vision of absolute perfection. The desire for divine intervention vibrates through this poem, it goes beyond a prayer, he is confronting the altar boldly. What has he done wrong that the gods cannot make cohere?

It is not surprising (though certainly disturbing) to next meet Henry James, and the exiled Princess Bariatinsky, like a mismatched vaudeville team, cast up in a net of Homeric phrases from a thirty-year-old memory of a garden party. The half-mad Princess and her terribly polite (heroic) captive share a truth Pound seizes on in the present. He identifies for one odd second with the princess. She knows too, what it is to be surrounded by "escorts," "cossaks" — by riders, one of whom is not the official executioner, just a soldier "who executes." Hadn't Pound had a foretaste of his country's style of hands-on justice? Hadn't he seen it in the camp, inmates shot by "mistake," exonerated in the post-war atmosphere of opprobrium?

Now the moon has a "swollen cheek" (like his own, perhaps, from sleeping on concrete) and when the morning sun begins to light things up, Old Ez folds his blankets. The prayers to the Lynx go on. The birds on the wire are no longer setting the rhythm; there is another, rising beat, the momentum of invocation. As the sun rises and the figwood fires burn, the eyes of the imagination stay on what needs to be guarded, to be "kept" sacred. And as prayer articulates our dread, Pound's mind worries each vision,

refuses to relinquish it to equivocal language. The litany is ecstasy and it is despair. Much like *Alba*, Pound's longtime dream of the dawn of a new American renaissance, the return of the earthly Paradise.)

Now the canto is visually very beautiful. The white of the lynxes and the pomegranate red of the rising sun fill the sky. ("Red? White? No, but a color between them / When the pomegranate is open and light falls half through it.") The underworld, where Persephone may not eat of the pomegranate, is abandoned. The night has seemed half a year long ("we are here waiting the sunrise / and the next sunrise") as nights do among lynxes. And more to come.

One has to imagine the aging panther — scraggly, blood-colored-and-grey beard, green cat eyes (the way he once described Arnaut) standing in his cage-cell, alone, half-mad, with an invisible mental baton. The great cloud orchestra before him, the Heliads before him. ("Neither Eos nor Hesperus has suffered wrong at my hands") . . .

And then Aphrodite steps from the sea-foam, the Goddess arrived, full daylight, negating his presence entirely, what he wanted in the first place. The reader too is left alone with the echoes, left in the simple fact of the physical world, sun up, private trouble.

No H.D. or any other mortal woman, no matter how loyal, can get the sun up. Only the Goddess, the perfect one, his *liaison blanc* — whose eyes on his blinded him, made him bestial, but made him also a demi-god. Paradisio *spezzato* — slipped through the net again, who was he? Standing there for a thousand years in the wink of an eye: old man in a cage, conducting the sunrise.

CANTO CXVI

Came Neptunus
his mind leaping
like dolphins,
These concepts the human mind has attained.
To make Cosmos —
To achieve the possible —
Muss., wrecked for an error,
But the record
the palimpsest —
a little light
in great darkness —
cuniculi —
An old "crank" dead in Virginia.
Unprepared young burdened with records,
The vision of the Madonna
above the cigar butts
and over the portal.
"Have made a mass of laws"
(mucchio di leggi)
Litterae nihil sanantes
Justinian's,
a tangle of works unfinished.

I have brought the great ball of crystal;
who can lift it?
Can you enter the great acorn of light?
But the beauty is not the madness
Tho' my errors and wrecks lie about me.
And I am not a demigod,
I cannot make it cohere.
If love be not in the house there is nothing.
The voice of famine unheard.
How came beauty against this blackness,
Twice beauty under the elms —

To be saved by squirrels and bluejays?
"plus j'aime le chien"
Ariadne.
Disney against the metaphysicals,
and Laforgue more than they thought in him,
Spire thanked me in proposito
And I have learned more from Jules
(Jules Laforgue) since then
deeps in him,
and Linnaeus.
chi crescerà i nostri —
but about that terzo
third heaven,
that Venere,
again is all "paradiso"
a nice quiet paradise
over the shambles,
and some climbing
before the take-off,
to "see again,"
the verb is "see," not "walk on"
i.e. it coheres all right
even if my notes do not cohere.
Many errors,
a little rightness,
to excuse his hell
and my paradiso.
And as to why they go wrong,
thinking of rightness
And as to who will copy this palimpsest?
al poco giorno
ed al gran cerchio d'ombra
But to affirm the gold thread in the pattern
(Torcello)
al Vicolo d'oro
(Tigullio).
To confess wrong without losing rightness:

Charity I have had sometimes,
I cannot make it flow thru.
A little light, like a rushlight
to lead back to splendour.

IMPROVISATIONS ON POUND

Frankly, I'm not sure it's such a good thing for writers to write 'about' other writers, especially those whose work they admire. Such work should be endlessly variable, offering something new with each rereading. Once you write 'on' another writer, a certain solidification must necessarily take place, or at the least a necessary narrowing of vision. And at once a certain stratification sets in: you've had your say, you've made your mind up: it's this way, it's read this way. As I say, I resist this. And having said so, I'd like to talk a minute or two about Ezra Pound, who certainly believed the opposite.

The world is divided into those who like Pound up to *Mauberley* and those who think his best work comes afterward. *The Cantos* is the landshed — if you like him, he starts there. If you don't, that's where he stops. It's a bit like going to the circus and leaving before the animal acts and the trapeze high flyers come on. The first Cantos I read were *The Pisan Cantos*, in a huge green and white Guandi paperback of poor quality which I loved and have to this day. Before that I had read the Faber *Selected Poems*, which was big medicine for me — the first poet I'd actually read on my own and hadn't been assigned. And one who talked about places I was walking around in, Sirmione, Verona and the others I'd subsequently go to and look at more closely.

I remember how it began for me with *The Cantos*. It was one word, *dodici*, in *The Pisan Cantos*. The line was *Trattoria degli Apostoli (dodici)*. It referred to a restaurant in Verona, the town I lived in. It came at the end of Canto 74, the first Pisan canto, and the first canto I had ever read. It was a reference I fully understood — it was the most famous restaurant in town — and I think I thought, "If I can understand this one, maybe the others can be tracked down too." And so I began to read them for what they were saying as well as for the music of the lines, the only thing I had responded to be-

fore, when he would put on his 'poetry' mask and take off his 'message' one. From that day I read much farther in it.

At Coltano, on the flat Pisan plain at the edge of the great Maremma swamp (disfecemi Maremma), the man swung his arm to the left, pointing out from under the pine trees toward a wide, empty field, golden in the June sun: *I repubblicanini* (meaning Fascists, the holdover believers, members of the Republic of Salò) *erano li.* "The Republicans were there." Nothing, of course, remained of 40 years before, nothing was out there but the fierce sunlight. We were standing in front of the building which had served as the headquarters for the American forces, in the shade of the Tuscan pines. "And over there," he gestured, "were the others, officers on one side, soldiers on the other." And that was all. Later, on the pine-bordered road that ran alongside the field where the *repubblicanini* had been kept, I stopped and looked back toward Pisa. Off to the left an Alitalia jet undulated through the heat waves as it moved slowly into take-off position on the new jetway of the Pisa airport. And over the town, the calibrated, steadily symmetrical mass of Monte Pisano (Taishan) rose through the haze, still keeping Lucca from seeing Pisa, as Dante has said, and over which, as Pound repeatedly asserted, were clouds as fine as any in Italy. But not today: not a cloud, not a smudge: only the malarial, faded blue of a scorched June day when one could feel, out in the noon sun, the top of one's head begin to loosen. Later still, of course, we found we had gone to the wrong place. An American prison camp, yes, but Pound had been farther north, near Metato. But the heat was the same, the emptiness was the same, and the sense of everything having come to a bad end was surely the same.

It has often been said — and with some truth — that Pound spoke best through another's mask. It is a fact that *The Cantos* has many personae and many voices. It is also interesting that the one section which has little, if any, ventriloquism is *The Pisan Cantos*, writ-

ten during the time when he was effectively without books (He was translating Confucius, true, at the same time, and had Legge's Chinese-English dictionary, but that was a different project altogether; and he did have a Bible and an anthology of English verse). This remains my favorite section, where he speaks with his own voice and about things that are around him in the natural world and about those things he remembers. Always as EP, however, always as Old Ez out of his own despair and affirmation and not out of anyone else's mouth.

The Cantos is essentially mystic/religious: Greek/Roman, Troubadour/Condottiere influence giving way to a strange Confucian /Dantescan (both 'reflectors' of light) orthodoxy. (No Dualism in Confucius: the arrow doesn't have two heads. Nor in Dante.) They are laced with The Mysteries ('The gods have not returned, they never left.' 'Eternal states of mind,' he called them.) and American Transcendental ethics. Confucius becomes the main religious thread — the good man, the good state, the man standing by his word. Mencius quotes Tsang as saying after Confucius' death: "Washed in the Kang and the Han, bleached in the autumn's sun's slope, what whiteness can one add to that whiteness, what candor?" A Confucian when he died, apparently still a believer in the Greek gods, he was buried in a Catholic cemetery (*Reparto Evangelici*) by an Anglican priest after an ecumenical service. Layers within layers past the end.

I think Pound to be the most American of poets, especially of his time, including Williams. American of a certain, unflagging sort: more European than the Europeans, more concerned about their heritage than they were. Like Berenson. But with such a Twainian 'innocence abroad.' His poetic line ends up a broken Whitmanian line and he remains totally American to the end: paranoid, in a 'white study.'

As in the Mysteries of Eleusis, not too much should be revealed — wonder and awe must reside always in partial obscurity. Thus the core of *The Cantos* remains: unresolved, unexplainable. Unfinished, hardly ever revised, the parts trailed along for almost 50 years until a comprehensive revision, even had they ever been finished, was out of the question. Analogies to music, painting, ancient and medieval story lines, associational blocks of information, etc., all exist but do not satisfy completely. The poem was never finished, thus it has no Final Form. Which is all right as far as I'm concerned, the sum of the parts adding up to more than the whole. Since the *Metamorphoses*, the book of changing forms, was one of the formal icons of *The Cantos*, how can one be surprised that the poem keeps shifting under our very eyes and resists all efforts at formal declension?: seen from this angle, it's this, seen from another it's that? Its *only* constant seems its inconstancy. The gods are capricious: we do the best we can with what we've got to wrestle some order out of a large and overwhelming body of chaos. He never finished the poem, it was abandoned. All his models suited a world-view and world-order that no longer applied in the 20th century. His final structure ended up not so much as changing and shiftable (as in the *Metamorphoses* and *Divine Comedy*) as liquid and uncontainable. If it remains a voyage of discovery to the end, then the emphasis is on *voyage* and not *discovery*. The attempt to make everything coalesce, time and space, to include everything, past and present and future in one suspended, eternal state, never stopped. Interruptions were there, but probably not in the writer's vision, more likely in the material itself. If it is an overall 'failure,' as it probably is, it is the most interesting failure of the century and, to my mind, the most aesthetically pleasing poem, either failed or realized, of the century. Its ultimate formlessness becomes its Ultimate Form. This, as well, is part of the Process: if one of the primary urges of a work of art is to become circular and come to a completion, then one of the real jobs of the artist is to keep this closure from happening so he can work in the synapse, the spark before the end. Surely *The Cantos* accomplished this and continues to be Process and part of The Way (Confucius) even after it has stopped. Heracleitean to the

end. His Paradiso is a collection of notes, in shorthand, elliptical. One of the few 'sustained' fragments is Canto CXVI.

If the overriding poetic consideration is one of form, then one of the great thrusts of *The Cantos* is the search — unsuccessful — for Major Form. 116 is the admission that it has not succeeded, at least not on the page. It is the broken shadow, *spezzata*, of the ideal form he saw in the air, or thought he saw, for 50 years. He foundered on his own Paradiso: in periplum, where the winds took him, not an orderly Dantescan rising. And they did not take him to Dioce, the city whose terraces were the color of stars, ideal city, though he thought he knew where it was.

Canto CXVI, lines 23-26: light, order and beauty: main threads being pulled together: *attempt* to pull them together by naming them. Some considerations: the great ball of crystal and the acorn of light are the two symbolic points toward which the poem has been leading us. Crystal is the image of paradisal clarity. He calls on the meanings of crystal as structural mineral formed through the evaporation of water, as highly transparent cut glass and as synonym for eyes. The succession of fire/light/crystal suggests how crystal synthesizes the aspects of the sun and moon, the total light process, the intelligence. The Chinese ideogram for the intelligence: "the sun and the moon, the total light process, the radiation, reflection and reception of light," though not in this canto, is alluded to throughout the poem. Some further considerations: the acorn of light and Grosseteste, one of the medieval, Generation of Light philosophers Pound had been interested in since his Cavalcanti days: "Light shines in all directions so that a point of light will at once become a sphere of light of any size unless curbed by some opaque object." Also, in Paradiso 28, Dante sees the point of pure light which is God reflected in Beatrice's eyes — it shines from the Empyrean through the Crystalline Heaven of the Primum Mobile. In lines 53/54, Dante and light come in again with the explanation of the verb 'to see': i.e.,

you see Paradise, you don't walk on it (Also 'see again' may allude to the last words of the *Inferno, reveder le stelle.* Or it could be when Dante is blinded in Paradise when he looks at St John to see if he has been taken up in the body: his sight is restored and he sees Adam . . .). And then the final allusion in the last two lines of the canto: "A little light, like a rush light / to lead back to splendour." (Splendour has been tangentially alluded to before in line 29 — "I cannot make it cohere" — which reference may be to *Women of Trachis* where Pound has Herakles say: "Splendour, it all coheres.") In lines 8-11, Pound has talked of "the record / the palimpsest — / a little light / in great darkness — ": is this then it, the record, the poem, his palimpsest of history, a small light, etc.? Is splendour Pound's imagination? Paradise? Is it the Manichean splendor of the One Light? Scotus Eregina's light? Grossteste's? Dante's? The divine spark in man where everything is one and everything is fire / Heraclitus at the beginning of all things (and at the end)?

A last consideration: this is Pound's gloss on a passage from Richard of St Victor: "They are ineffable and innumerable and no man having beheld them can fittingly narrate them or even remember them exactly. Nevertheless, by naming over all the most beautiful things we know we may draw back upon the mind some vestige of the heavenly splendour."

There are, of course, references to other continuing preoccupations throughout the poem in this last finished canto (the last if one discounts 120, as one is often tempted to do since it seems an addendum rather than a culmination): the unwillingness to release Mussolini, his chosen figurehead for the new state and ideal system, wrecked because of a bunch of laws (*mucchio di leggi*) — the error of not bringing order to himself, thus not being able to create order about him (Confucius, Canto 13); the wreckage of his own poem, his own errors, out of which he continually hands forth his 'notes,' as he calls his work; the continued insistence on love as the guiding principle in all things; his assertion that there

is a coherence in history, in the flow of civilization, even if his poem doesn't cohere, that there is a gold thread in the pattern, that he is right to have tried to follow it wherever it led him, even if he did not get back to the splendor of total order and beauty and harmony inherent in the universe.

As postscript: 5 August, 1985, I drove to the Padua train station and caught the 9:54 Milan-Venice train. On arrival in Venice, I took the vaporetto to Rialto, got off and walked in the direction of the Fondamente Nuove, where one catches the boat to Murano, Torcello and San Michele, the cemetery island. Along the way I stopped at the church of S. Maria dei Miracoli, a Renaissance church built in the 1480s and much admired by Pound, especially its marble carvings, up near the apse, by Pietro Lombardo, and especially still, several of their delicate mermaids and putti. I admire them myself, and a toothed dolphin around one corner as well. Later, on the boat, the sky was that summer blue-white of washed-out denim, the green swells like marble in their sheen. The grave was easily found and is obviously visited often, though I was alone during my entire visit. A circular plot of ivy and grass with a small tree at the back (laurel?): a simple marble slab reads EZRA POUND. Section XV, mostly foreigners — English and German. The most interesting inscription belonged to one Archibald Campbell, master of the SY Minerva, who died on board in 1891 at the age of 56: "The heart knoweth its own bitterness and the Stranger intermeddleth not therewith." I walked back to the Pound grave, wanting to leave something, and at last took a eucalyptus pip I had carried in my jacket pocket for years and placed it flat side down in the middle of the O in POUND, a coin for a closed eye, and left.

As addendum to the postscript: Later, sitting on the Zattere, I had lunch (close to the Rio S. Trovaso) with the critic David Kalstone. He told me a little story about the only time he had met Pound. They had been sitting outside having coffee after supper, he and Pound and Olga Rudge and the sculptor Joan Fitzgerald.

The only light seemed to gather on Pound's hands, he said, everything else and everyone else in a kind of elusive, watery darkness, and throughout the time they sat there — while Pound apparently spoke, but inaudibly, his comments being repeated each time by Olga Rudge — Pound kept scratching at the back of one hand with the nails of the other, clawing almost, over and over, as though to rid himself of something: only the hands obsessively scratching in the artificial light, the voice inaudible and sibylline.

Sachiko Yoshihara

FROM THE AFTERWORLD

"Rewarding or punishing, the king of
the afterworld is fearful."

This is my skull
lying from long ago in the grass.
Bamboo floats up skyward from the eyes.
But my left eye doesn't ache any more.

My flesh rotted and melted away.
As we turn into skulls our faces become the same —
no one can tell if it's me or you.
I faintly remember committing sins before birth,
bloody dark sins before my birth
before that shiny edge of the basin for the newborn,
that shiny edge for washing the newborn.

I die again, I live again, I make mistakes again.
Thank heaven I forget those punishments for my sins.

It shouldn't happen, to see the future as clear as the past,
one measure of punishments for one measure of sin,
tenfold more for tenfold more sin. . . ,
that should never happen.
I committed my sins with a trembling heart,
but they shouldn't be forgiven, either, for just one prayer.

In many burning evenings
I was ravished by floods of gentleness,
and if you say that's a sin
I bore many children of sin —
many shadows in the skull,
many dreams.

If you say it's a sin,
I will eat the filthy punishments

with my two lips painted red.
I will embrace the burning torture post.

Dogs nibble my bones
sweetly.

Bamboo sprouts float upward.
Everything swings in the wind.
From the dark hollow of my skull
These bamboo words float. . . .
My left eye aches after all.

translated by
Yorifumi Yaguchi and William Stafford

SO HIGH

that you can see where you fell
from the Dunkerton silo
    at nine, or the sumac spear
I aimed at you,
threatening your eye — the retrospect
    is all the way

to childhood — you're riding the sway,
each foot cupped
    in last year's scions,
sawing, sawing a place for the sun

to freckle onto the roses.
    My role is brake
on the nylon line I've tied to my waist,
a moebius-twist that loops

yellow through the camphor
    tree's eternal green. Bark comes down;
then you scab off a boot heel
    like some body part,
always pulling more line until I lose
what I knew of you.
    One tree's enough

logic to climb through imagining
    veer under the elbowdeep green,
taking countless
false handholds until you come out

in sky. Now the sun multiplies
    off your tools,
but you don't ripple the saw again
through the steady groan

of the wood — you've seen the horizon
    cut by roof-peaks
in your balkanized neighborhood of small lots.
    In identical trees you see
other men sway
    over reflected heat thrown
up from the asphalt shingles: you wave

they wave.

for my brother, Gerry

DRIVING WITH ONE LIGHT

that strokes shapes out of the trees,
that makes far-back eyes
prickle, I fight right
then left the two halves of an S-curve

four hrs into the Sierras.
I keep the white
centerline flowing under the VW,
denying the peripheral

animal world that flares momentarily.
I'm in a second world
the radio makes because sleep presumes

that first world I will not to enter.
Wrong-facing signs reflect my only light
as the two-lane road overtakes

rockface turn, then tree then tree.
In the righthand dark something lives,
spreads against the windshield,

then breaks through
to where I am, civilized, wary & cursing.
Owl or nightblind hawk,
I flap my arms as the creature flaps

in the glass shards.
Tree patterns come into the light,
then trees as the car skids,
parting laurel & low brush

I oddly try to name
before the car stops, tearing a visible blaze
in a big Doug fir.

Whatever it is is across one leg

as I roll out the sprung door;
it moves, it flutters as I push
my back against the door,
trapping inside the worst I can imagine,

nauseous in the sudden dark.

CRUSH SYNDROME

Once when, in winter dark,
I was cleaning the concrete mixer,
its cogwheels, like the teeth
of a bored rat of Ibadan,
snapped up the glove
with the hand inside. The finger bones
said a few things you don't hear very often
and then it grew quiet, because
even the rat had panicked.

In that moment
I realized I had a soul.
It was soft, black, with red stripes,
and it wanted to be wrapped in gauze.

I put it beside me on the seat
and steered with the healthy hand. At the clinic,
during the injections of local anesthetic
and the stitching,
the soul held firmly with its mandibles
to the knob of the table.
It was whitish crystal
and had a grasshopper's head.

The fingers healed.
The soul turned, at first,
to granulation tissue,
and later a scar, scarcely visible.

VANISHING LUNG SYNDROME

Once in awhile somebody fights for breath.
He stops, getting in everyone's way.
The crowd flows around, muttering
about the flow of crowds,
but he just fights for breath.

Inside there may be growing
a sea monster within a sea monster,
a black, talking bird
a raven Nevermore that
can't find a bust of Athena
to perch on and so just grows
like a bullous emphysema with cyst development,
fibrous masses and lung hypertension.

Inside there may be growing
a huge muteness of fairy tales,
the wood-block baby that gobbles up everything,
father, mother, flock of sheep,
dead-end road among fields,
screeching wagon and horse,
I've eaten them all and now I'll eat you,
while scintigraphy shows
a disappearance of perfusion, and angiography
shows remnants of arterial branches
without the capillary phase.

Inside there may be growing
an abandoned room,
bare walls, pale squares where pictures hung,
a disconnected phone,
feathers settling to the floor,
the Encyclopedists have moved out and
Dostoyevsky never found the place

lost in the landscape
where only surgeons
write poems.

HEMOPHILIA

And so it circulates
from the San Bernardino Freeway
to the Santa Monica Freeway and
down to the San Diego Freeway and
up to the Golden State Freeway,

and so it circulates
in the vessels of the marine creature,
transparent creature,
unbelievable creature in the light
of the southern moon
like the footprint
of the last foot in the world,

and so it circulates
as if there were no other music
except Perpetual Motion,
as if there were no conductor
directing an orchestra of black angels
without a full score:

out of the grand piano floats
a pink C-sharp in the upper octave,
out of the violin
blood may trickle at any time,
and in the joints of the trombone
there swells a fear of the tiniest staccato,

as if there were no Dante
in a wheelchair,
holding a ball of cotton to his mouth,
afraid to speak a line
lest he perforate the meaning,

as if there were no genes
except the gene for defects
and emergency telephone calls,

and so it circulates
with the full, velvet hum of the disease,
circulates all hours of the day,
circulates all hours of the night
to the praise of non-clotting,

each blood cell carrying
four molecules of hope
that it might all be something
totally different
from what it is.

translated by David Young, with the author

LUCK

One of us threw an empty soup can out
onto busy Sheridan Avenue for the dog
to chase after. He'd do anything.

It was the first time I'd seen the twitch
and tingle, the trembling that comes just
before death. We pulled him to the side

and he stared at the sky and the sky went
down, like always. All that summer all
I ever wanted was to pitch, run, hit, and catch.

And the sounds of cars whirled in the wind
for days. They were real but they grow quiet.

*

I've heard the retina holds an image for
one-sixteenth of a second, that what
we respond to is not light

but light falling, the electro-magnetic spectrum
we think of as light. Not knowing, uninformed,

I hauled my Rawlings mitt through traffic,
through rain turning to snow,
and if I had a grown man's thought

it never occurred to me
to let what was hidden remain so.

*

Wish me luck, we say, and off we go.
Back home, luck is what they wish, and possibility,
and an honesty toward possibility.

When you turn from the river because
the river is cold, or because it reminds
you of home, pick up a rock and hold it

because it is cold, small, rolled in on itself.
Now aren't you better? Don't you feel good?
You have made your own bald luck.

This is your home now.

*

Last week, in my new Kentucky home, I heard
on the news that two grown men who
were policemen got drunk and drove to
a parking lot to quick-draw. Luckily,
there was no harm done, both had to resign.

And lucky for us they aren't cruising
the streets keeping the streets intact.
Still, your heart goes out to them.
Will the mind ever heed its mindless asking,
"How's a guy to have any fun?"

*

A field in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in mud. The air
smells of carbon. I dig in the mud for the old
dog's skull. To take it home
to my own backyard where, if luck will
have it, it grows.

And I think the old man was right
when he complained that his choices
kept choosing him. In my yard,
mimosa and poplar, burnt elm,
sycamore, ash, and magnolia.

BY FIRE

They put fire to the woods and
all day and all night the gallberry scrub
smokes and flares, a skittish battleline
of flame, using up the forest tinder
like envy. You can walk out there the next day
fully aware that in two weeks the Christmas ferns
will have turned this waste into a garden, but
as you stoop to pick up a charred thumb
which turns out to be what's left of a mole,
a baby possum maybe, you come alive a second
to ruin and death. All around you the pine
trees, shingles seared, are still standing. The fire
is help to them, a kind of haircut
you might say, like taking the poodle in to get sheared;
they'll flourish for it. Soot floats
into your nostrils, your hands turn black;
what wasn't lucky won't be missed
at a no alarm fire. Human need runs in close
to the way things work
for once — lightning
that flushes the gutters of the world — and it doesn't matter
if the slow, or the attached, or the lazy
couldn't get out of the way, what soars
climbs higher. What's still living thanks you.

DISCOVERY

You can go out on the Suwanee
and float half the way across Florida
without seeing anyone. There are alligators
and coons, and wild hogs swimming the river.
Fifty miles in
you come to a great sculpture made of ropes
swinging between trees. You can pass under it
and from your back look up at the creases
and streaks cutting the sky. On islands
in the pines are the remains of fires, the broken poles
of tents, the tin pans with holes in the bottoms.
It is the way they felt
at the edge of Scotland when the first Norman walkers
came on Hadrian's Wall, so ancient,
the color of turtles, splintered
by lichen, built from the minds
of millionaires who vanished so long ago
their names have become charms —
the way they felt, looking
at the mystery, precise as a buoy
introducing the sea.

BARRACUDA

A rack of them, curved,
minimally askew, a dozen
or more, close enough to make out
their beaks and some teeth.
Suspended, serene,
like a still photo of the load
dropped from a bomber's belly.
I think — it isn't, the ocean,
so lovely, and remember
from a book: they rarely attack
humans and then only if

they wear a shiny thing.
Since I left my sheriff's badge ashore,
held no silver coin
or plate, wore no signet ring,
nor carried a sandwich wrapped in foil,
I think: good: I'm (I'm thinking
all this *fast*) safe. But can
one be, in this their world,
these brilliantly designed *fish*
who must be thinking: Looks good

to eat but it doesn't shine,
let's call Shark. I snorkle
slowly back to the boat, barracuda
off my port, noses at me,
and holding. I love
the little colored fishes that hug
the shore. Out here, where I heave
myself aboard, it's too deep
and belongs too much to fear
for me: air-breather, buoyant, cousin
to dry pages.

TRAVELING EXHIBIT OF TORTURE INSTRUMENTS

What man has done to woman and man
and the tools he built to do it with
is pure genius in its pain. A chair of nails
would not do without a headrest of spikes
and wriststraps pierced with pins.
The Head Crusher, for example — "experts
disagree about this piece: is it 17th or 18th Century?"
This historical hatband contracts and contracts,
by screw, and was wrought by hand.
These skills, this craft, gets passed along.
Take the *Red Hot Pincers and Tongs*,
which were "addressed mostly to noses, fingers, toes.
Tubulor pincers, like the splendid crocodile
shown here, served to rip off . . ." I have been in pain
at museums, openings, but not
like this: *The Heretic's Fork* — "placed
as it is, allows the victim only to murmur:
I recant." In all the pictures
the man and woman chosen do not
appear in pain: sawed lengthwise,
wrecked on a rack or wheel, they do not
look in pain. And the torturers
(the business always *official*)
seem disinterested, often flipping
pages of a book — one of laws, of God.
It seems most times men did this or that
so terrible to him or her
it was because God willed it so.
Or, at least, they thought He did.

THE UNREAL DWELLING: MY YEARS IN VOLCANO

What I did, I won't excuse,
except to say it was a way to change,
the way new flows add to the land,
making things new, clearing the garden.
I left two sons, a wife behind —
and does it matter? The sons grew,
became their own kinds of men,
lost in the swirl of robes, cries
behind a screen of mist and fire
I drew between us, gambles I lost
and walked away from like any bad job.
I drove a cab and didn't care,
let the wife run off too, her combs
loose in some shopkeeper's bed.
When hope blazed up in my heart for the fresh start,
I took my daughters with me to keep house,
order my living as I was taught and came to expect.
They swept up, cooked, arranged flowers,
practiced tea and *buyō*, the classical dance.
I knew how because I could read and ordered books,
let all movements be disciplined and objects arranged
by an idea of order, the precise sequence of images
which conjure up the abstract I might call
yūgen, or Mystery, *chikara*, . . . Power.
The principles were in the swordsmanship
I practiced, in the package of loans
and small thefts I'd managed since coming here.
I could count, keep books, speak English
as well as any white, and I had false papers
recommending me, celebrating the fiction
of my long tenure with Hata Shōten of Honolulu.
And my luck was they bothered to check
only those I'd bribed or made love to.
Charm was my collateral, a willingness to move
and live on the frontier my strongest selling point.

So they staked me, a small-time hustler
good with cars, odds, and women,
and I tossed some boards together,
dug ponds and a cesspool,
figured water needed tanks, pipes,
and guttering on the eaves
to catch the light-falling rain,
and I had it — a store and a house out-back
carved out of rainforests and lava land
beside this mountain road seven leagues from Hilo.
I never worried they'd come this far —
the banks, courts, and police —
mists and sulphur clouds from the crater
drenching the land, washing clean my tracks,
bleaching my spotted skin the pallor of long-time residents.
I regularized my life and raised my girls,
put in gas pumps out front, stocked varieties of goods
and took in local fruit, flowers on consignment.
And I had liquor — plum wine and *saké*
from Japan, whiskey from Tennessee —
which meant I kept a pistol as well.
My girls learned to shoot, and would have
only no one bothered to test us.
It was known I'd shot cats and wild pigs
from across the road rummaging through garbage.
I never thought of my boys,
or of women too much
until my oldest bloomed,
suddenly, vanda-like, from spike
to scented flower almost overnight.
Young men in Model A's came up from town.
One even bussed, and a Marine from Georgia
stole a Jeep to try taking her
to the coast, or, more simply,
down a mountain road for the night.
The Shore Patrol found him.
And I got married again, to a country girl

from Kona who answered my ad.
I approved of her because,
though she was rough-spoken and squat-legged,
and, I discovered, her hair
slightly red in the groin,
she could carry 50-lbs. sacks of California Rose
without strain or grunting.
As postmaster and Territorial official,
I married us myself, sent announcements
and champagne in medicine vials
to the villagers and my "guarantors" in town.
The toasts tasted of vitamin-B and cough syrup.
My oldest moved away, herself married
to a dapper Okinawan who sold Oldsmobiles
and had the leisure to play golf on weekends.
I heard from my boy then, my oldest son,
back from the war and writing to us,
curious, formal, and not a little proud
he'd done his part. What impressed me
was his script — florid but under control,
penmanship like pipers at the tideline
lifting and settling on the sand-colored paper.
He wrote first from Europe, then New York,
finally from Honolulu. He'd fought,
mustered out near the Madison Square Garden
in time to see LaMotta smash the pretty one,
and then came home to a girl he'd met in night school.
He said he won out over a cop because he danced better,
knew from the service how to show up in a tie,
bring flowers and silk in nice wrappings.
I flew the Island Clipper to the wedding,
the first time I'd seen the boy in twenty years,
gave him a hundred cash and a wink
since the girl was pretty,
told him to buy, not rent his suits,
and came home the next day, hungover,
a raw ache in my throat.

I sobered up, but the ache
stayed and doctors tell me
it's this sickness they can't get rid of,
pain all through my blood and nerve cells.
I cough too much, can't smoke or drink
or tend to things. Mornings, I roll
myself off the damp bed, wrap
a blanket on, slip into the wooden clogs,
and take a walk around my pond and gardens.
On this half-acre, calla lilies in bloom,
cream-white cups swollen with milk,
heavy on their stems and rocking in the slight wind,
cranes coming to rest on the wet, coppery soil.
The lotuses ride, tiny flamingoes, sapphired
pavillions buoyed on their green keels on the pond.
My fish follow me, snorting to be fed,
gold flashes and streaks of color
like blood satin and brocade in the algaed waters.
And when the sky empties of its many lights,
I see the quarter moon, horned junk,
sailing over the Ka'u and the crater rim.
This is the River of Heaven. . . .
Before I cross, I know I must bow down,
call to my oldest son, say what I must
to bring him, and all the past, back to me.

Volcano, 1985

SURROUNDED BY MOUNTAINS

Digging potatoes east of Sapporo
we would listen at noon to world news.

The little radio in one of the furrows
was propped against a lunch bucket.

We didn't make any judgments. Our fields
were wide, slanting from wooded foothills.

Religious leaders called for
a revival of spirit in the world.

Certain statesmen from important
nations were considering a summit meeting.

Old Mrs. Osaka, permanently
bent over, stirred the clods beside her.

Rice fields, yellow as sunflowers,
marked off kilometers below us.

The shrine where the crows lived
had a bell that told us when rest was over.

Goodby, old friends. I remember the Prime Minister
talking, and the water jar in the shade.

CROWDED FALLS

Our school had art and Miss Frazier, who also
monitored recess, and loved physical
education, Mr. Cobello —
a statue at flag salute.

Now they are all waxworks.
No grownup would like my thoughts — Miss Frazier
unhurt in a fire but all her clothes
burned off, and I on the ladder to save her. . . .

All waxworks.
A scenario runs in my head:
they disappear over the years. How tame
the curriculum was!

But strange and sweet, like love.
Gone like bubblegum.

OUTSIDE WICHITA

Working on its map, the river evaded big hills,
and the little ones ran away shivering.
Trains and storms went by.

Declarations of smoke hovered our chimney,
then streamed away becoming more and more silent
especially in winter toward sunset.

In school we painted pictures of ourselves
as old people, carrying the moon on our backs
and climbing the earth where wheatfields led.

All the roads we followed could find each other
or wander back through grass. And years the same.
Then war came. Then it was tomorrow.

SATURNALIA

Peep Show

On a winter evening, the children have made
peep shows in shoeboxes,
each world meant to be microcosmic,
though even the light,
coming through the square they have cut
in the lid, is distorted.
We are drawn, as always,
to the outrageous, the man in a shiny suit —
cut unwittingly large by one of the children —
standing taller than the cotton smoke
drifting off the chimney,
than the fir tree in the forefront, glistening.

Procession

The hilarity after embarrassment.
The embarrassment, the kind of shyness
a magician's subject feels when made to appear.
Though these were ordinary children,
found in the open, and in the clearing,
the empty house near them was made
of cypress planks, notched together, nailless,
and the garlic had gone to seed around the cistern.
When the children plucked the purple clusters,
the odor taught them
that they had come this far.

There were the dogs that led them here,
charging through the orchard, barking.
There were the sounds that informed the dark,
the stars seeking out their relative positions.
There was the buck that ran faster
than the dogs, faster than the stars,

faster than the children.
There were the children who followed
with the attitude of those bearing musical instruments,
the rasp of kazoos, the miniature accordian.
The posture was the posture of a parade
because the children were anonymous.

This, though, was their sadness:
that the buck disappeared in the pin oak and pine,
the Spanish moss blurring his traces,
that the bark worn from the trees
showed them his passage,
the velvet rubbed from his horns
so that he might grow, in time,
the brow antlers, the bay, and the royal.

Pageant

Tonight the horses flare along the fences.
All day they have eaten the pears
fermenting in the orchard,
so that now in the darkness, there is only
the sheen of their haunches
and the feeble light
given off by fruit expiring.

The children leap from the hayloft
with coat hanger wings left over
from an Easter pageant
though the gauze fails to lift them
out of this sequence.
In the reaches of a lantern,
a blue runner spirits its way through the grasses,
thrilling the children,
though each of these creatures,
apart from the others, is harmless.
The snake, alarming in its closeness,

will seek cover along a wash in the loess,
the horses will be stabled,
and where one child has lain dizzy
in the straw,
an angel suggests itself the next morning.

HOUSE OF STRAW

Then the wasp returns to the vespiary,
the brown recluse carries its violin into the dark cupboard,
and the ladybug crawls down in the woodpile,
among the red hearts of the cedar. . . .

Is this an ending, or do you believe in Life Everlasting?

I remember we were transferred to New Orleans,
my mother crying at the supper table
while the red and green roosters strutted across the kitchen
wallpaper —
out the window, disappearing, the home-made go-cart
with a hood of green linoleum, and the turtle with a shell
painted with a Florida palm tree.

Can you take your home with you?

The summer it flooded, the fire ants formed balls
to roll themselves across the water.
People slept on cots at Our Lady of the Sea School
and the river rose so high on the levee
the ships sailed on the current of leaves over the Garden
District.
At night we slept below sea level under the rudder.

Do you believe that life is directionless?

There was dusting powder swirling through the hallways,
the dark stain on my panties, a wand of mascara. . . .

Are you saying the answer lies within us?

I read *The Password to Larkspur Lane,* lying on the horsehair sofa.
Look, I said to my brothers, I'm holding the key to the world.
Then I curled the lid backwards, and we lifted the sardines,

lying in rows, and smeared them on saltine crackers.
We ate them on the balcony while the poinsettias rotted below.

Would you say this was the beginning of sadness?

My brothers threw a baseball in the evenings in their
bedroom —
the light outside, the color of Four Roses poured into glasses —
until one night they threw it through the wall.
They covered the hole with a map of the world,
and for years they kept it a secret,
the darkness spiralling, unknown to our parents, under
Louisiana.

What did they teach you about the scope of the world?

They said if we took our shovels in the backyard,
we could dig a hole so deep we'd get to China.

Is home a place you ever get to?

I remember the little holes the ant lions lived in
and the way they grasped the straws we lowered
as we chanted doodlebug, doodlebug, come out, come out,
your house is on fire.

CONTRIBUTORS

RALPH BURNS has been teaching creative writing at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. He is the author of two collections of poetry, **Us** (Cleveland State) and **Any Given Day** (Alabama). Starting in January, he will be poetry editor of **Crazyhorse**.

NORMAN DUBIE's **Selected and New Poems** is available from Norton. His next collection, **The Springhouse**, will appear from the same publisher next spring.

Recent books by DONALD HALL include **The Man Who Lived Alone**, a children's book (Godine), **Fathers Playing Catch with Sons** (North Point), and **The Oxford Book of Children's Verse in America**.

MIROSLAV HOLUB's new poems were written while he was a visiting writer at Pitzer College in California last spring. A new essay by Holub appeared recently in **Vanity Fair** and one is due in **Science 85**.

GARRETT HONGO teaches at the University of Missouri in Columbia and co-edits poetry for **The Missouri Review**. His first book of poems, **Yellow Light**, was published by Wesleyan University Press.

JAMES LAUGHLIN writes "Please invent anything you want for the note, but here are two thoughts: James Laughlin studied with Pound at his Ezuversity in Rapallo in 1934-35, and later became Pound's publisher at New Directions. His book of **Stolen & Contaminated Poems** (Turkey Press, 1985) contains poems stolen from Pound or contaminated from authors Pound assigned him to read. 20 pages of "non-notes" are mostly recollections of Pound." He adds, "I'd like to plug the book where I can because how are the Turkeys going to sell it at $60 (let alone $120 for the copies on paper they made from Japanese seaweed and sage brush) unless collectors want to get at the Pound?" Collectors take note, please.

THOMAS LUX is back at Sarah Lawrence after a recent stint of teaching at Iowa. His book, **Half Promised Land**, is due next April from Houghton Mifflin.

WILLIAM MATTHEW's most recent book of poems, his sixth, is **A Happy Childhood** (Atlantic, Little Brown). He lives in New York City.

CAROL MUSKE's third book of poems, **Wyndmere**, is pub-

lished by Pittsburgh. She is presently teaching in the Professional Writing Program at the University of Southern California.

STANLEY PLUMLY is currently working on a book about John Keats's last eighteen months. He teaches at the University of Maryland. His most recent collection, now in paperback, is **Summer Celestial** (Ecco).

SUSAN PROSPERE grew up in Mississippi and currently lives in Houston. She has had poems in several magazines, including **The New Yorker**, and has won Discovery Awards sponsored by PEN and **The Nation**.

DENNIS SCHMITZ lives and works in Sacramento, California. His most recent book is **Singing** (Ecco).

CHARLIE SMITH's novel, **Canaan**, was published by Simon and Schuster last February. His poems have appeared in many magazines. He is currently a Writing Fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown.

WILLIAM STAFFORD continues an active life of traveling, reading, and writing. This fall, for example, he is writer in residence at the Atlantic Center for the Arts, in Florida. His new book in the Poets on Poetry series from the University of Michigan Press will be titled **You Must Revise Your Life**.

CHARLES WRIGHT teaches at the University of Virginia. His most recent book of poems is **The Other Side of the River** (Random House). His translation of Dino Campana's **Orphic Songs**, published last year in the FIELD Translation Series, continues to attract enthusiastic readers.

SACHIKO YOSHIHARA is a contemporary Japanese poet. Her translator, WILLIAM STAFFORD, heard her read the poem in this issue, "From the Afterworld," at an international conference of writers in Yokahama in August, 1984. He notes: "Along with Shuntaro Tanikawa and other leading Japanese poets, she demonstrated what a low, controlled voice, a manner from serious to menacing to sardonic, and great variety in dynamics can do to electrify an audience. Her dark poems, interspersed with sharing, conspiratorial glances at the audience, made very effective theater and kept her listeners keyed up for every line."

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EZRA POUND, POET, RUTHERFORD, NEW JERSEY 6·30·58
PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON

Dear David, Pound being old and tired, the order of poems in the final volume of Cantos was decided on by a committee of family and the publisher. In early editions, then, the complete Cantos ended with the lines, "Let those I love try to forgive/what I have made." Olga liked that ending, feeling those lines were addressed to her — and certainly in a poem inspired by the Divine Comedy, confession of error has a place. But some readers, myself included, felt such an ending not in accord with the character of the whole poem or with the poet's personality for most of his life. I remember arguing the point with Mary at Brunnenburg one summer and with Olga at Venice one winter. In any case, recent editions end with the line, "To be men not destroyers" — to my judgment a brilliant summary of the whole poem. Ma'a s-salama. Bill McNaughton

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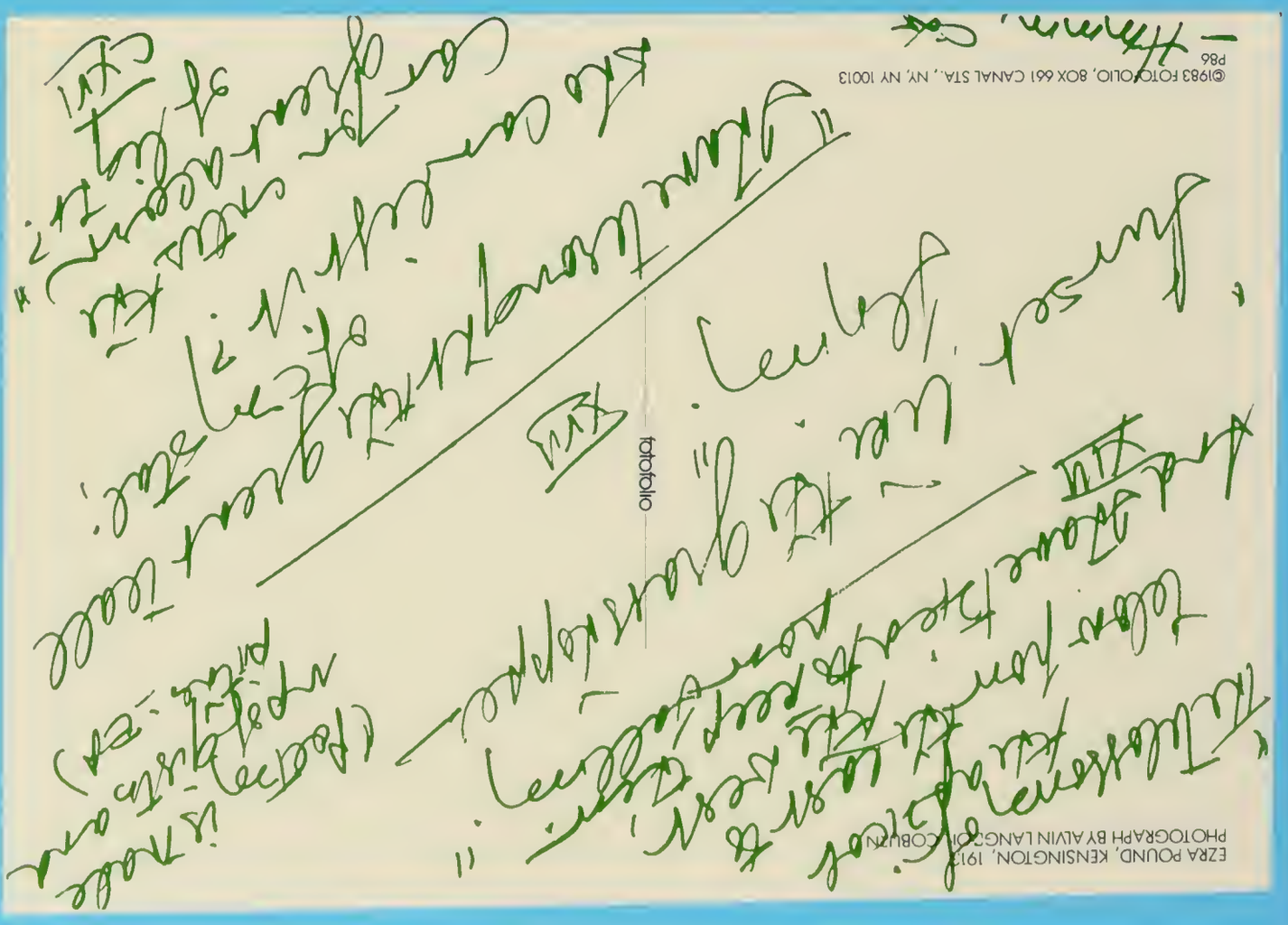
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